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Mrs Marion Still
Headteacher
Barling Magna Community Primary School
Little Wakering Road
Southend-on-Sea
SS3 0LN

Dear Mrs Still

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barling Magna Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also scrutinised information about pupils' achievement, a range of pupils' writing books and the minutes of the strategic intervention board. We jointly observed teaching in all six classes in addition to observations of phonics teaching groups and other small group teaching.

Context

There have been no significant changes at the school since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and your senior leadership team have moved quickly to tackle the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. The school has produced a detailed improvement plan. This plan is appropriately focused on the areas for improvement identified in the most recent inspection report. It sets clear targets for accelerating pupils' progress and raising attainment. While there are some useful, measurable targets relating, for example, to the quality of teaching and the use of assessment, the plan does not make clear exactly how these actions are intended to raise pupils' attainment. Additional support is being provided to accelerate pupils' progress in Year 5 but the expected impact of this on how well pupils are doing is unclear.

More teaching is now good or outstanding, and the inconsistencies reported at the time of the last inspection have been almost eradicated. In all classes wall displays are very well used to exemplify high expectations and celebrate good work. Classrooms display work across a range of subjects and provide a good balance of pupils' own work and useful hints, questions and words for pupils' to make use of. Initiatives to improve teachers' use of questioning and pupils' ability to question and prompt one another are proving very successful. Teachers use a range of questions to consolidate pupils' understanding and pupils confidently discuss their work and question one another about how well they are doing. Almost all of the teaching is now lively and interesting. As a result, pupils are increasingly eager and enthusiastic learners. Relationships are good, pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and they have positive attitudes to learning. You now monitor the quality of teaching and learning more frequently and effectively. Teachers know how well they are doing and how to improve further. While the pro-forma used to record lesson observations are well structured, observers do not always report on the important link between the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making. Observations are too often a chronology of teaching and actions. There is also too little focus on whether teachers have high enough expectations of pupils' written work.

The quality of marking has improved significantly since January. Pupils are very clear about how the new marking scheme works and readily respond to teachers' comments and suggestions. They say it is really helpful to them in improving their work. Those pupils spoken to were eager to show me examples of teachers' comments and how they had corrected or improved their work as a result, for example by using speech marks or adding capital letters to begin sentences. Marking and responses were equally effective in mathematics and English. Teachers have raised their expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation. There has been a rapid improvement in the standard of presentation but some pupils' handwriting is proving a tougher nut to crack. Target setting has improved, with pupils able to talk confidently about their English targets and identify how well they are doing. They say the targets are useful in seeing how well they are doing and identifying what they need to work on to improve further.

As a result of improving teaching, pupils are making better progress. Those pupils currently in Year 2 are expected to do better in reading and mathematics. Year 6 pupils are expected to do much better in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress is accelerating across the school with pupils in Years 2, 5 and 6 doing particularly well. Scrutiny of pupils' books confirms the view that achievement is rising in English and mathematics. The Early Years Foundation Stage was recognised as a strength at the time of the last inspection and teaching here continues to be strong.

The governing body is beginning to play a more important part in school improvement. Governors spoken to were clear about the impact of new strategies to accelerate pupils' progress in Year 5, the impact of target setting and how the school is working to improve communication with parents. Governors are keen to become more involved in scrutinising pupils' achievement, particularly how well different groups of pupils are doing, and recognise the need for further training to develop their skills and knowledge.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has made good use of external support and advice. Members of the governing body have valued the recent local authority review of governance. They accept the recommendation for further training on evaluating provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and new assessment arrangements. The school has valued the links with an outstanding local school and opportunities for the headteachers and other staff to work together. The strategic intervention board is proving an effective strategy for ensuring the school makes rapid progress and for making sure the right levels of support and challenge are in place. There has been good support from the school's linked advisor and from local authority consultants to improve the quality of teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex local authority.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector