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Philip Butcher
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Butcher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Priory Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 July 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 March 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, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy and assistant headteachers, a governor representative and the Chair of the Governing Body the school's local authority school improvement advisor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The post inspection action plan was evaluated. Informal visits were made to classrooms and learning areas. A range of documentation was considered including: individual literacy and numeracy action plans; details regarding governor training; planned training to address necessary developments in pupils' reading skills; minutes of governing body and individual committee meetings; leaders' and managers' reports to the governing body; pupils' attainment and progress data; outcomes of monitoring activities; and self-evaluation procedures. In addition, the local authority advisor provided reports from core visits and a review of the school.

Main findings

Since your appointment as headteacher two years ago, you have created a challenging, exciting and aspirational environment where everyone is committed to ongoing improvement. Prior to the recent inspection in March this year, you had succeeded in establishing considerable change and improvement. Following the inspection, you and your senior leaders lost no time in stepping up the rigour and pace necessary for rapid improvement. You have successfully communicated your high expectations of all staff and pupils. You have created an energetic and hard-working team, improved teaching, provided focused intervention and targeted training to meet individual and whole school needs. As a result, pupils' progress has accelerated and there is much to celebrate. Early indications of standards achieved by pupils this year show noteworthy improvements when compared with past results. The proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress by the end of Key Stage 2, has improved significantly particularly in reading and mathematics. In addition, progress data for each year group indicate a continuing trend of improvement.

Teachers provided an impressive range of additional support for Year 6 pupils leading up to their tests and assessments this year. You and the senior leadership team are well aware that improved standards is a responsibility for all teachers and cannot be left to intense teaching in Year 6. All teachers are suitably aware of their responsibility to assess pupils' needs and assure their progress. Leaders all expressed ambitious and relentless expectations for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children joining the Reception class in September have already had their induction time in the new setting to help them settle quickly. The children's age-related knowledge and skills will be assessed without delay in September.

You have an unrelenting focus on the quality of teaching and its link with rates of pupils' progress. Where you and other leaders have concerns you are quick to intervene and provide solutions. You rightly hold teachers to account but you make sure that they all develop the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties to the best of their ability. The senior leadership team uses a range of information to identify priorities. Nevertheless you are all careful that a higher focus on one aspect does not undermine the importance of skills in others. As a consequence of improved subject expertise, staff are now more able to hone in on the skills pupils need. Teachers' ongoing assessments of pupils are checked and scrutinised again by independent parties to ensure accuracy. Regular pupil progress meetings are held between you, other senior leaders and teachers. These meetings not only identify those pupils who are in danger of falling behind but also highlight those who are excelling and require extension. Pupils who struggle are identified quickly, support provided and their progress is reviewed every three weeks. Pupils, in discussions, explain accurately where they are on their learning journey. They do not depend on teachers to tell them the next steps, they know them.

You have devolved and developed leadership responsibilities which you have underpinned with suitable training and support. Leaders and managers conduct a range of rigorous monitoring activities to ensure that expressed expectations, procedures and agreed methods are implemented consistently and to an acceptable standard. You report that teachers too, are more able to review the success of their support for pupils and take the initiative to make the necessary changes. Judgements about the quality of teaching is suitably informed by joint lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning as well as the tracking and analysis of pupils' on-going progress. This information, together with pupil progress meetings, informs decisions about the performance of all staff so they are fully aware of their accountability in raising standards. Every member of staff has an individual training plan matched to their needs. All staff know the priorities at any given time, for example, a focus on pitch and expectations in their planning. The deputy headteacher is now a subject leader for education (SLE), specialising in literacy and the coordinator for disabled and special educational needs provision has undertaken up-to-date training with the National College. Two newly qualified teachers joining the school in September have already received two day's induction training so they can quickly pick up their responsibilities.

Displays seen during the informal visits to classrooms show a rich balance of subjects learned by pupils and the wide activities they experience to enrich their learning. Classrooms are well organised, clean and tidy and reading corners are attractive and welcoming. The exciting and impressive outdoor area and resources inspire enquiry and imaginative play.

The governing body has not been complacent and a review of governance has been completed. The local authority advisor led three training sessions. As a consequence, the governing body has gained a clear insight into the expectations of their contribution. Governors' skills were audited and further training identified. Governors have considered the structure of the governing body to increase their effectiveness. Governors compiled an action plan pertinent to their needs so they are themselves accountable for their speedy improvement. You and the local authority advisor report that governors are growing in confidence and expertise. They now ask searching questions and demand information to substantiate what they are told. Governors have, with your help, created an impressive calendar of events to scrutinise pupils' work, visit lessons and build a range of evidence to help them fulfil their roles. Governors want the best for the pupils and they are proud to serve the school. This commitment was exemplified when governors advertised vacancies and went through recruitment procedures four times before appointing a teacher who met their standard.

Your post inspection action plan addresses all of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. The planned actions are helpfully broken down into relevant, clear steps and contribute realistically to the expected outcomes. The plans are appropriate for incremental improvement. They include a balance of training, checks, procedures and peer coaching. In addition, you are prepared to

introduce imaginative methods to improve the pupils' learning experiences. You plan to identify and share good practice both within the school and in others.

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 local authority has provided effective support and training for staff and governors. The local authority school improvement advisor has provided objective evaluations of teachers' assessments to ensure their accuracy. The report following a recent core visit demonstrates a good range of gathered evidence to support the evaluative judgements and feedback. The report clearly identifies the school's substantial achievements against the identified areas for improvement. The advisor has also rightly taken into account the relevance of the school's improvements in preparation for the new curriculum demands in September this year. Governors' knowledge, skills and appreciation for their role and responsibilities have improved as a result of training. Everyone reports a noticeable increase in governors' confidence, raised expectations and improved ability to challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector