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26 September 2014

Jennifer Moles
Headteacher
Margaret Wix Primary School
High Oaks
St Albans
AL3 6EL

Dear Miss Moles,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Margaret Wix Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 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. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the action plan shows clear dates and deadlines for monitoring the success criteria for all actions
- ensure that teachers model the school's handwriting policy at all times.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and you took me on a tour of the school. You shared with me the results of this year's Key Stage 2 national tests and I checked the school's single central register.

Context

Two temporary teachers left the school at the end of the academic year and two teachers returned from maternity leave, part-time, in September. Three additional teachers joined the school in September, two of whom are newly qualified. The deputy headteacher and the Key Stage 2 leader now have non-class-based roles. One new governor has joined the school. You have had new outdoor playground equipment installed.

Main findings

The proportion of pupils who attained at least the expected Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 tests improved this year and was above the national average in all areas. The proportion of pupils attaining higher than the expected level was above the national average in all areas except writing. Some pupils achieved Level 6 in the spelling and grammar test for the first time. The school's own data show that progress also improved this year and is now above the national average.

The proportion of pupils who attained at least the expected Level 2 at the end of Key Stage 1 was below the national average this year, reflecting the very high mobility of this cohort. Fourteen pupils left and 17 joined the school during the academic year; some pupils had only been in school for a matter of weeks before they were assessed. The proportion of pupils who reached the higher levels was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of Year 1 pupils who attained the expected level in the Phonics Screening Check rose by 20 percentage points this year and is now in line with the national average.

The school's action plan includes all the improvement points from the last full inspection and is clear, rigorous and focused. The plan includes explicit success criteria and has been reviewed and is up-to-date. You now need to ensure that dates and deadlines for monitoring all outcomes are added to the action plan. Governors have very good knowledge of the school and are holding you fully to account.

A review of the way the school uses pupil premium funding was carried out by the local authority in June 2014 and concluded that it is using the grant well. This is confirmed by this year's Key Stage 2 national test results that show that pupils eligible for the pupil premium attained in line with the national average in reading and mathematics. School data indicate that the attainment gap is narrowing in all year groups. However, these encouraging results have not made you complacent and this area remains a high focus. Two members of the senior leadership team have strategic responsibility for ensuring that pupil premium money is spent effectively and that targeted pupils achieve well. You have adjusted your staffing arrangements so that both members of staff are able to intervene directly to support teaching and work directly with pupils to accelerate learning.

Assessment data is plentiful, analysed fully and used to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support and challenge. The achievement of pupils is tracked frequently and well so that progress is improving as a result. Governors have received training on understanding and interpreting assessment data and are now better able to ask challenging questions.

Lesson observations have been used well to improve the quality of teaching. You have worked with a colleague from an outstanding local school to ensure the reliability of your judgements. You have also observed jointly with the school's improvement partner. The school's observation records show that the quality of teaching is now good or better. You focused your observations on the achievement of more-able pupils and this has helped to raise expectations. More-able pupils are included on teachers' provision maps and there is now more focus on ensuring appropriate challenge for this group. The above average results at the higher levels in the Key Stage 2 national tests evidence the success of your actions. The school's own data show that, with the exception of Year 2, half of more-able pupils are now making better than expected progress.

A new marking policy has been implemented and is fully embedded throughout the school. You sensibly changed the timetable to ensure that pupils always have the chance to respond to marking before starting a new piece of work. I was able to see clearly that this is firmly embedded across the school and the impact it is having on moving children's learning forward. Handwriting is better in some classes than in others; all teachers need to model the school's style so that expectations are clear.

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 provides good support and reviews the school's performance regularly. Senior leaders now join you when you meet with the improvement partner. The school improvement partner confirms that the school takes full advantage of the opportunities that are offered but that you did not need support to write a suitable action plan. The improvement partner has worked with middle leaders and has carried out joint observations with you. A literacy advisor from the local authority has already provided training for staff and further sessions are planned.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector