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14 October 2014

Mr Iain Gilmour
Headteacher
Isambard Brunel Junior School
Wymering Road
Portsmouth
PO2 7HX

Dear Mr Gilmour

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Isambard Brunel Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 second 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 you and the deputy headteacher, representatives 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. With you and the deputy headteacher, I visited classrooms, talked to pupils and looked at their work. I also scrutinised pupils' books and reviewed the single central record of teacher vetting checks.

Context

One new teacher has joined the school since the last monitoring visit. You returned to work in September following a period of absence. The school will become an academy with the Thinking Schools Trust academy chain on 1 November 2014.

Main findings

Since the last monitoring visit you have focused more effectively on strategic planning. The school improvement plan has been re-written and now shows more clearly what staff need to do to help the school become good. The plan is underpinned by useful development work with staff to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the school's priorities. However, the improvement plan does not yet identify who will monitor and evaluate the actions undertaken. An overall strategic vision for the school is not yet in evidence but it is good to hear that you plan to address this with the Thinking Schools Trust academy chain.

Pleasing test results for Year 6 last summer reflected improvements in the quality of teaching. Pupils made progress in line with or better than their peers nationally, and this trend is continuing with the current Year 6 cohort. You are now building on this success through rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and good use of a robust system of assessment.

Since September you have spent time ensuring that all teachers are now clearer about what good teaching looks like. Visits to good and outstanding schools to reinforce this message are planned for later this term. Our visits to classrooms revealed a better match of work to pupils' abilities; pupils are engaging well with their work and comment that they find tasks challenging. You have recently become more directive in terms of how you expect teachers to plan and mark pupils' work, and have introduced more robust whole school systems to support this. It is too early to say whether this is having an impact on pupils' progress yet.

Since the last monitoring visit governors have taken swift action to improve their work. An external review is booked for late October and three members of the governing body attended a 'Better Governance' event led by Her Majesty's Inspectors. Recently, governors were able to review staff pay and performance decisions more robustly after useful training. Governors have completed a brief action plan. This is useful, but does not yet explain the purpose behind the actions to be carried out or what difference they will make to raising standards.

External support

The local authority provides good support and challenge to the school through regular meetings with you. Effective training has been provided for leaders, teachers and governors, and the school has engaged well with the local 'getting to good' network for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector