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Jackie Irwin
Headteacher
Engaines Primary School
St Osyth Road East
Little Clacton
Essex
CO16 9PH

Dear Ms Irwin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Engaines Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 the deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the special educational needs coordinator to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with seven members of the governing body and a local authority education adviser. We jointly observed teaching in all ten classes and looked at the most recent achievement data. I scrutinised a range of writing books.

Context

The school hopes to convert to an academy in the near future, but no final date for conversion has been set.

Main findings

The school's senior and middle leaders have taken rapid action to begin to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Subject leaders have more time to carry out their responsibilities. They are now better able to balance the requirements of subject leadership with their role as class teachers. Senior and middle leaders have started the term with a renewed sense of purpose. They are having a galvanising effect on school improvement.

The school has produced a detailed improvement plan which has a sharp focus on the areas for improvement identified in the most recent inspection report. It dovetails these well with the school's own priorities, such as the introduction of a more exciting curriculum. While actions are clear, and generally time-limited, it is less clear what the impact of these actions on pupils' achievement is expected to be. This limits the ability of governors to hold the school to account for how well it is doing.

Senior leaders have acted quickly to improve the quality of teaching. There is now greater consistency across the school. All classrooms include a display board to exemplify the school's rising expectations. Pupils can see what good work looks like and can attempt to emulate the best. There are also display boards providing extra information for pupils on their current work, which act as an additional resource. In classrooms and corridors pupils' work covers a wide range of subject areas, including mathematics, English, science and history. Classrooms and shared areas are bright, colourful and stimulating. The school has thought carefully about how to make writing more exciting, particularly for boys. As a result, there is a greater focus on topics which will enthuse all pupils, and the use of computers as a stimulus for writing. The school has invested in extra resources, including staff training, to improve the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. The revised marking policy is beginning to improve the quality of pupils' work. When teachers make suggestions for improvement, pupils are expected to respond promptly. Pupils say this is helping them to improve their work for example, by encouraging them to use more exciting vocabulary or improving their punctuation. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They work equally well with individuals and groups of pupils. In future, teaching assistants will work even more closely with teachers and will have an even sharper focus on pupils' progress.

The most recent unvalidated test and assessment results indicate that pupils are doing better. The phonics screening check results for Year 1 pupils are similar to those of other schools nationally. Pupils in Year 2 did best in reading and writing, although not enough pupils reached the higher level 3 in writing or mathematics. Year 6 pupils did better overall in reading, writing and mathematics but once again, too few pupils reached the higher Level 5, particularly in reading and writing. Because of a much greater focus on pupils' spelling and punctuation, test results for grammar, punctuation and spelling improved markedly. Across the school pupils are doing better. More are making expected progress.

At the time of the last inspection, pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning were identified as a strength. This remains the case. In all classes, pupils

work with enthusiasm and sustain their concentration. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils enjoyed describing an imaginary island on which to train a dragon and delighted in telling their classmates about 'towering cliffs', lush landscapes' and 'picturesque beaches'. They showed good independent working skills when selecting a thesaurus to help then enliven their choice of words. The youngest children were observed working hard on improving their early writing and communication skills. They concentrated well, in spite of the deluge outside. In order to improve the life skills of older pupils the school has recently opened a school bank, with support from a local credit union. Pupils have been trained as cashiers and enjoy taking pupils' deposits and informing them about the 2% interest available. This innovative practice prepares pupils well for the future and encourages them as responsible citizens and savers.

The governing body knows the school well. They speak with confidence about improvements in teaching and learning and how these are starting to accelerate pupils' progress. They described in detail how the professional development of staff, coupled with clearer expectations, is resulting in greater consistency across the school.

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 is working closely with an outstanding junior academy in Witham. It values the support of the local authority education adviser, who has worked closely with the senior leadership team to improve provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, learning in the Reception class now has a sharper focus on improving children's communication and number skills. The school also works with a range of local schools in order to share best practice.

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