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Heather Brookes
Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)
Antrobus Road
Handsworth
Birmingham
B21 9NT

Dear Mrs Brookes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)

Following my visit to your school 29 January 2015, 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 September 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 the pace of improvement, while rapid, is manageable by identifying when each action on your plan will happen and when you will judge the impact of the action (not just how).
- streamline information about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement to enable you to focus sharply on the key priorities
- ensure all teachers have sufficient opportunity to discuss their progress, not just those about whom you are most concerned.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with; the headteacher and deputy headteacher; members of the Governing Body; a national leader of education (NLE) representing the local authority; and the headteacher of a local school providing support to improve leadership and the quality of teaching, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated. Documents relating to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement were examined.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, two teachers have left the school. Another teacher is due to leave soon. A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage has been appointed. She is due to take up her post towards the end of February. You have redeployed staff to strengthen the leadership of English and to secure staffing stability in the Nursery. A national leader of governance is supporting the governing body to re-constitute. This process is scheduled to be completed on 24 February.

Main findings

You, other leaders and governors responded to the inspection outcome with a sense of urgency. You and your deputy head teacher have used the support available from the LLE and NLE to create an effective programme of training and coaching for teachers and subject leaders. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and many pupils are making better progress. For example, weaknesses in the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) have reduced considerably. Teachers are more confident in how to teach letter sounds. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are acquiring phonic knowledge quickly. Gaps in phonic knowledge for pupils in Years 1 and 2 are closing and pupils are beginning to use letter sounds more confidently when reading and spelling new words.

A training and development programme for teachers, senior leaders and subject leaders is set out in an action plan. This plan maps out how you will know that the school has improved and includes helpful descriptions that will support you in judging whether you are making progress. The plan does not show dates when you will evaluate progress against these descriptors so you are not able to judge whether progress is swift enough. The plan is very detailed, but does not show an overall picture of the expected pace of actions. This leads to the danger that, while teachers are working hard to implement new strategies, they can become overloaded and the impact of each strategy become diluted.

Teachers generally challenge pupils more effectively now. In some lessons, the most able pupils are given additional challenge, for example by the teacher asking probing questions. However, some pupils are still given work that is too easy. In some classes, pupils spend too long repeating what they can already do because teachers

do not check whether pupils are finding work easy. Pupils are not encouraged to move on harder work as soon as they are ready. Occasionally, time is not well managed so pupils do not work productively. You have made your expectations clear about how you want teachers to mark pupils' work. Most are following these guidelines. Some marking is leading to pupils making more rapid progress. However marking does not ensure pupils achievement is good because not all teachers are using the agreed strategy effectively.

During this visit, pupils' behaviour in lessons showed they enjoy their learning. Nevertheless, when the work was too hard or too easy, some pupils became distracted. This slowed their progress.

You and your deputy headteacher frequently check the quality of teaching. You have established a clear set of expectations for teachers to follow. After lesson observations or scrutiny of pupils' books, you make it clear to teachers where they are meeting these and what they need to improve. You use your checks to match support to the teachers in greatest need of improvement. As a result of this close monitoring and effective support, teaching is improving rapidly in some classes. Your records of monitoring activities are very detailed. You spend too much time typing these up, which means you do not have enough time to rigorously check if all teachers are sticking to the agreed actions. Therefore, your monitoring has not ensured all teachers are consistently following agreed practices. Not all staff have the opportunity to discuss their progress with you regularly enough. Consequently, improvement is happening at different rates for different teachers.

Detailed tracking shows many pupils are now making rapid progress in learning phonics. This is the result of improved leadership and effective coaching. You now track pupils' overall attainment and targets more closely. Your checks focus on attainments and on overall progress figures. You do not record the progress being made by different groups of pupils clearly enough. Therefore you cannot sufficiently demonstrate where gaps are closing and where they are not. You collect a great deal of information about pupils' attainment in different formats. This leads to some lack of clarity about what this is telling you. There is no clear summary of achievement information which makes it difficult for you communicate the picture succinctly to governors.

A review of the effectiveness of the governing body is underway. Governors have a better understanding of their role and are more confident to ask challenging questions. They have a sensible plan for how they will fulfil their responsibilities following the reconstitution of the governing body in February. Governors have increased the frequency of meetings to ensure they receive appropriate training and are kept well informed. Governors use the school development plan to check what improvements are being made. As there are no dates which set out by when each improvement is anticipated, governors are unable to hold you to account for whether progress is swift enough.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. At this visit, it was agreed that you would:

- Send HMI copies of your reports to the governing body and termly updates on pupils' achievement.
- Attend HMI-led workshops as directed.

External support

Teachers have visited range of other schools to see examples of good and outstanding teaching. Training has been scheduled for all teachers on improving questioning and challenge. Teachers reflect on these experiences and use them to guide their own improvement, such as by agreeing targets and next steps. Support from the LLE for improving leadership skills has led to improvements in the teaching of phonics. The LLE and NLE have supported you in writing the action plan. The NLE has scheduled time to carry out external reviews to evaluate the impact of actions each term.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority