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4 March 2015

Mrs Suzanne Ryan
Headteacher
Katherines Primary School
Brookside
Harlow
CM19 5NJ

Dear Mrs Ryan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Katherines Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- strengthen the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they become fully responsible for checking standards and pursuing improvements in their areas of responsibility
- recruit a full governing body so that improvements in offering challenge to senior leaders can be sustained
- address the gaps in pupils' knowledge, particularly in Years 5 and 6, to improve their achievement at the end of Key Stage 2
- sharpen the way all teachers use their knowledge of what pupils can do to inform their planning so that all pupils make good progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, members of the school's governing body and your school improvement partners, as well as the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and documents relating to the outcomes of monitoring activities. I visited every class with you and spoke to pupils about their work. I also looked at a variety of pupils' work both in their books and on display in classrooms and scrutinised current progress data.

Main findings

Following the inspection in November 2014, you, your staff and the governing body have responded with a renewed determination to make Katherines a good school. Some of the changes and new policies that were already in place and recognised in the November inspection report are now beginning to have an impact. You have also welcomed external support, in particular from your partner school through the National Education Trust, and have created a culture within school where new ideas are welcomed and carefully evaluated to gauge impact on the progress of your pupils. As you said during our tour of the school, 'everything is now connected to learning' and this clarity of purpose is evident in the new classroom displays which are designed to promote learning and have raised the aspirations of pupils. Teachers are generally expecting more of their pupils, and of themselves. This is seen in the 'Big Writing' books where work is well presented and shows that the progress of many students is accelerating, particularly in Key Stage 1 and Year 4. Pupils were involved in challenging activities in most classrooms.

The early years learning area, especially the outdoor space, has improved since the November inspection. The area now has clear zones which encourage purposeful activities that, for example, encourage children to apply number skills and solve problems collaboratively - such as how to build a vehicle with milk crates. Children are also able to take risks, such as working out how to get down safely from a beam, in a controlled environment. Because of this more organised approach, adults are able to identify which children would benefit from intervention and so help them to take the next steps needed to accelerate their progress.

Teachers and middle leaders are now more confident in assessing the levels at which pupils are working and then using this information to identify who needs extra support. The effectiveness of these interventions on progress is carefully monitored. Some teachers are beginning to use information on progress to help them plan tasks that are appropriate to the needs of individual pupils. Because of weaker teaching in the past, too many pupils, especially at Key Stage 2, still have gaps in their knowledge. These need to be addressed quickly to ensure they reach the levels they are capable of in the end of key stage assessments.

Since the November inspection, you have increased the number of opportunities for pupils to use and apply mathematical skills in practical ways. Middle leaders also check that pupils' work is effectively marked and are developing the confidence to challenge and support other members of staff as necessary. They are working with middle leaders from your partner school to continue to develop their skills – for example in observation and feedback. Your senior and middle leaders are not yet taking on the level of responsibility that gives you the support you need to continue to move Katherines forward.

Members of the governing body now make weekly monitoring visits to the school. They are part of a robust monitoring programme that checks that the action plan is kept to. Governors now ask for evidence about the impact of these actions as well as just checking that they are happening. Despite a recent recruitment drive, the governing body remains two members short. This situation is putting pressure on the existing members as they strive to fully support your drive for improvement. Although further training is needed, and indeed planned, governors are more confident about challenging what they are told and holding you to account for the progress and attainment of your pupils.

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

Leaders and teachers have received effective support from your National Education Trust partner school commissioned by the local authority and your school improvement partner. Your teachers have benefited from the sharing of good practice and your middle leaders in particular have gained a better understanding of their role by working alongside colleagues in another school. Both partners, as well as other external agencies have been used to validate the accuracy of teachers' assessments.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex Local Authority and the National Education Trust.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Associate Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority