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19 March 2015

Mr Jack Newton
Interim Executive Headteacher
Underhill School
Mays Lane
Barnet
EN5 2LZ

Dear Mr Newton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Underhill School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the infant and junior schools joined together to form a single primary school in September 2014. Both schools had received a previous monitoring inspection after they were judged to require improvement following section 5 inspections in September and October 2014. This visit 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 section 5 inspections. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all policies are reviewed and updated to reflect the new procedures that have been implemented across the school
- update the content of the school's website to ensure that it provides all of the required information and is easily accessible for parents.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the Head of School, groups of senior and middle leaders and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions you have taken since my previous visits to the junior and infant schools. I spoke to the Chair of the Governing Body by telephone. The school action plans were evaluated along with other documents detailing the schools' work. I joined you on a tour of the school and visited classes to talk to pupils and look at their books.

Context

The infant and junior schools have been amalgamated under a single leadership team and governing body. Together with the acting Head of School, you will remain in post until governors make permanent appointments to these roles. You have made changes to the responsibilities of some leaders to allow you to manage the merger successfully. Administration and support staff have had their working practices reviewed and adjusted. There are currently three temporary classroom teachers employed on long-term contracts. The number of temporary teachers has reduced since the start of the year, as permanent appointments have been made.

Main findings

You are tracking the progress that pupils make carefully using efficient recording systems. This information is then shared with teachers to help them plan appropriate learning activities. They know when pupils have gaps in their understanding and take action to address this quickly. Your assessment information shows that while pupils are making improved rates of progress throughout the school, some gaps remain. For example, some groups of pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are not yet achieving as well as they should be. Additional teaching interventions have therefore been put in place and are monitored carefully to make sure they are making a difference. Reading standards across the school have risen because of a carefully planned programme of interventions, monitored by a working party of teachers.

You are confident that the quality of teaching across the school has improved due to further support and training provided to teachers. For example, leaders have had more opportunities to work alongside their colleagues to model effective teaching strategies. The whole school marking policy is implemented consistently and pupils are provided with regular feedback to help them improve their work. Books are well presented and checked regularly to ensure that pupils are making better progress. Attractive classroom displays reflect the values of the school and provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on social, moral, spiritual and cultural themes during their learning. Leaders understand about the new assessment strategies being developed and feel that they have benefitted from opportunities to work with colleagues from other year groups. This has helped them to plan lessons that are progressively more challenging and identify when pupils have gaps in their knowledge that still need to be addressed. When teaching has been judged to be less than good, action has been taken quickly to ensure that pupils' learning is not slowed.

Since September, a new behaviour policy has been adopted across the school and there have been no exclusions. Pupils are increasingly engaged with their learning and when they need additional support this is provided through a range of planned interventions. Attendance rates remain below the national average but have improved recently as a result of closer monitoring and support offered to families. Despite the considerable upheaval caused by the merger of the two schools, improvements in teaching and learning have continued at a steady pace. Leaders

have a clear understanding of what actions are required to raise standards further and you have successfully engaged staff from both schools in the improvement process. You plan to make changes to the learning environment to better meet the needs of pupils. This will include the addition of a new building to physically link the two schools together by September 2015.

Governors from both schools have formed a new governing body and have set a clear vision to follow. They bring a range of skills and experience to their roles and have improved their capacity by appointing an additional vice chairperson. They understand that further work is still required to ensure that all policies are reviewed and amended to reflect the practice already in place. They are also aware that the information on the school website needs to be updated so that parents have access to all the information they are entitled to.

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

You continue to draw on a wide range of external support to help you implement the action plan. School leaders worked closely with the local authority to ensure the merger of the two schools was successfully completed in September. The school link inspector continues to visit every half term to check that improvements are happening quickly enough. You are also held to account by the Head of School Improvement every term when teaching and learning information is scrutinised.

You commissioned a full leadership and management review, which took place last week. This was carried out by an officer from the local authority, a National Leader of Education (NLE), an Ofsted trained additional inspector and a headteacher from a local successful school. The review recognised the progress that has been made and made further recommendations which will be implemented by leaders and governors. Senior leaders have visited a successful school in Sutton to evaluate how the leadership team has been structured to promote outstanding teaching and learning. You have arranged for teachers to work with colleagues from another school to check that they can assess the quality of pupils' work accurately. You have also joined a number of local partnerships, including a local teaching alliance, to help you plan further training opportunities for staff.

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

Yours sincerely,

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector