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28 April 2015

Elaine Fitzgerald
Brandhall Primary School
Edinburgh Road
Oldbury
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Dear Ms Fitzgerald

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Brandhall Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 April 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 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 that success criteria for identified actions have clear milestones which are measurable, wherever possible, by improved outcomes for pupils
- clarify how the impact of actions taken will be reviewed and who will be responsible for this.
- ensure that reviews of impact are used to inform next steps, including where targets can be raised.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, pupils, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was

evaluated. A tour of the school was undertaken and pupils' work was scrutinised, along with a range of other documents.

Context

Since the last inspection two staff have left the school and three were appointed at Easter. A new member of staff will join the school in September and you are currently recruiting for 2 Early Years teachers.

Main findings

Since the last inspection you, your leaders and governors have worked hard to begin to stabilise the turbulent staffing situation that has been a feature in the school over the last 18 months. Consequently, most teaching staff are now permanent appointments, enabling you to plan and focus support, development and challenge more effectively to improve teaching across the school. Furthermore, the school's self evaluation is now rigorous and supported by robust evidence. For instance, records of the school's monitoring of the quality of teaching show that a range of evidence is now used to judge performance, with pupils' progress at the heart of the process. This is supported by the increased rigour of pupil progress meetings, which are more sharply focused on rapid identification of pupils' needs, to inform early intervention, particularly for those groups who have not achieved as well as they should previously.

You agree that teaching still requires improvement because it is not yet consistently good in all year groups and all subjects. In part, you feel this is due to the staffing issues the school has been struggling with recently. We agreed that your first priority should be achieving a stable complement of staff. In September, another permanent teacher will join the school, reducing temporary staff to three out of 20 teaching staff. A key strength of the school is the willingness of those teachers who are well established at the school to support permanent new teachers and you feel that this will enable you to move the school on more rapidly, from September.

In response to the previous inspection outcomes you have introduced a new marking policy, which has now been in force for a term. However, although some staff are using the policy effectively and consistently, this is not the case in all year groups. Where marking is good, teachers explain what pupils have done well and what they need to improve. In the best examples, pupils respond thoughtfully, completing targeted gap tasks that help them improve and demonstrate their new understanding, so that a dialogue is built up that supports rapid progress. However, too much marking is limited to praise stamps, ticks or very short comments that do not enable pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Few topic books were regularly or helpfully marked in any year group and there is little evidence that teachers are routinely ensuring that pupils are required to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in such work, or that they are checking for these.

You have robust systems in place to track pupils' progress and plans are developing well to ensure that these will remain effective within the new assessment arrangements. Current information suggests that there will be a significant rise in achievement this year. Although attainment is likely to be slightly below national averages, you expect progress for Year 6 to be at least in line with expectations. Attainment for Year 2 pupils is likely to be slightly below national expectations. However, rates of progress have improved significantly for this cohort who entered key Stage 1 well below age related expectations. This is supported by the improvements secured in phonics. For instance in Year 1 85% of children are expected to complete phase 3 and 20% phase for. This compares to 2014 outcomes of 67% and 0% respectively. You are expecting 69% of Year 1 pupils to meet the national standard this year.

You and your leaders have had a strong focus on improving the achievement of groups. We agreed that writing remains a major focus for improvement across the school and that in some year groups more rapid progress in reading is also required to close the gap with national outcomes.

You have responded robustly to the review of pupil premium funding and the school's most recent data shows that disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress in all subjects. However, we discussed the need to ensure that expectations for these pupils needs to be even higher than for others if gaps are to be closed as rapidly as you wish.

The school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has worked hard to establish rigorous systems for identifying pupils with special educational needs, as well as those who may fall just below the threshold, but require some additional support. The precision tracking in place has already had an impact, which can be seen in the improving rates of progress for this group. Training has also been provided for learning support staff to improve planning and assessment for 'P' levels and you expect this to have an impact on rates of progress for these pupils.

In response to the last inspection, you have also undertaken baseline testing of all pupils for reading and comprehension. The outcomes from this have informed training for guided reading as well as delivery of speaking and listening activities in the classroom. This was noted as a feature in the classrooms visited during this inspection, where teachers actively encouraged pupils to express their ideas, explain their decisions and justify their arguments.

Improvements in the Early Years, noted at the last inspection, have continued. The Early Years leader has continued to develop the resources and learning spaces, improved assessment and ensured that Early Years practitioners have received training to rapidly identify and support those children who need additional help.

Governors have worked extremely hard to develop their skills rapidly. They have completed the review of governance requested, and produced and implemented an

action plan, many aspects of which they have already begun working on. They have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school and know where the 'risk factors' are. They have developed their understanding of data, so that they can challenge effectively and, with you and your leaders, have developed a process for planning and carrying out meetings, alongside a reconstitution of committee structures to better reflect the needs of the school.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing appropriate support and challenge through half termly 'Task Group' meetings. These are at an early stage at this point and evaluation of support so far has yet to be evaluated. However, additional bespoke support for teaching and learning and for leadership and management has been well received by you, your staff and governors.

The school belongs to a local cluster of schools and additional support is drawn from the teaching school within this, which you report has been helpful.

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

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy