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2 June 2015

Mark Owen
Interim Executive headteacher
Thornhill Primary School
Thornhill Road
London
N1 1HX

Dear Mr Owen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 June 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 January 2015. 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:

- strengthen governors ability to monitor the work of leaders by using measurable targets based on pupil achievement and the quality of teaching where appropriate
- improve pupils' handwriting skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim Executive headteacher, the assistant headteacher, and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, including the Chair, support staff, a group of pupils, and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated; a joint learning walk was undertaken with the Executive

headteacher and assistant headteacher, where the work in pupils' books was also examined. School documentation was scrutinised, including the records of behaviour and safety incidents, as well as the outcome of the external review of governance. Minutes of the monitoring group meetings, which includes representatives from the governing body, senior school leaders and the local authority head of school improvement were also examined.

Context

The interim Executive headteacher continues to provide additional leadership capacity. There have been no changes in the teaching staff since the previous section 5 inspection. The school has appointed an additional school administrator and two further lunchtime supervisors.

Main findings

You explained how the school has responded to the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. It is clear that you have created a collective responsibility and willingness from everyone to tackle these areas with a real sense of urgency. You continue to provide strong leadership and are very well supported by senior leaders, particularly the assistant headteacher who leads on curriculum development, assessment and teaching and learning.

You have raised expectations for pupil behaviour and safety. Pupils' safety is given the highest priority. There is greater clarity of roles, responsibilities and improved systems for record keeping. You now systematically monitor behaviour and the quality of teaching. This has secured rapid improvements in a very short space of time.

Incidents of poor behaviour, both in class and outside at break times, are methodically recorded. This provides a detailed overview of patterns in behaviour which are monitored and evaluated by the senior leadership team. Staff are better able to prevent and to effectively deal with unacceptable behaviour, including the use of discriminatory language. Pupils who lack self-control are provided with support and guidance, including reflection, counselling, and time out which usually prevents any reoccurrence. Pupils feel that their concerns are listened to via a variety of methods. Every class has a worry box, where pupils post their concerns if they do not have the confidence or do not wish to talk directly to an adult. Pupils make the decision as to whether they discuss their problems on a one-to-one basis with an adult or at a whole class level each week. Pupils appreciate this; they say 'it helps to calm people down'.

You have tackled concerns about behaviour on several levels. Staff have had training to improve their behaviour management skills. There is greater clarity as to what is acceptable behaviour. This has secured a culture of zero tolerance in the use of discriminatory language. All pupils are taught how to appreciate and respect

differences. For example, younger pupils are taught how to respect those pupils with disabilities. Older pupils engage in workshops to help them tackle and challenge the use of discriminatory language. Standards of behaviour and effort are given as high a profile as academic achievement through celebratory assemblies. Pupils have a sense of responsibility for their learning and behaviour, by taking on additional tasks such as peer mentors and play leaders. As a result you have effectively addressed the areas of weakness relating to behaviour.

Break times have been reorganised. Two additional lunchtime supervisors have been appointed to boost levels of supervisor. The playground is now zoned to ensure there is more space for pupils to play with a range of extended play equipment and to reduce potential collisions. Pupils say that behaviour has improved, which is confirmed as incidents have been reduced by half, since the previous section 5 inspection. Pupils also confirm that they now feel very safe at all times.

Evidence gathered during the learning walk confirmed that the new marking policy is beginning to bear fruit. Teachers now provide effective guidance to pupils on how to improve their work and pupils are given time to practise and extend their learning. Pupils enthusiastically told me that they appreciate the opportunities to respond to feedback in different ways, from asking their own questions about their work, engaging in a 'learning discussion' about strengths and areas for improvement with their teacher or assessing their own progress. This secures their engagement in their learning, speeds up progress and promotes their motivation and enjoyment. Work in books show a much wider range of subjects being taught, particularly in science. Nonetheless, although pupils' work books establish that presentation and completion of work has improved, pupils' handwriting is not always well formed.

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 has provided effective support for the school, particularly in providing further leadership capacity in response to the long-term absence of the substantive headteacher. The appointment of the interim Executive headteacher of a local outstanding school has proved to be a significant driver for improvement. Two local authority consultants work alongside both assistant headteachers to raise the quality of the curriculum and improve the systems for behaviour and safety. The governing body has taken on board all the recommendations of the external review. They have restructured committees so that their work is better focused on the school's areas for improvement. There are regular checks on the progress the school is making through the project group. Nonetheless, although the school's action plan is sharply focused on the priorities for improvement identified at the last inspection, outcomes are not always measurable or based on pupil achievement or the quality of teaching to enable governors to hold senior leaders fully to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector