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Simon Barker
Headteacher
Flash Ley Primary School
Hawksmoor Road
Stafford
ST17 9DR

Dear Mr Barker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Flash Ley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 February 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:

- write a school improvement plan, which builds upon the post Ofsted action plan, but contains longer term aims, measurable milestones and clearly identifies who is responsible for carrying out, monitoring and evaluating actions
- ensure that governors are fully involved in reviewing the action plan and contribute to the development of the revised school improvement plan. They should receive regular updates on progress against priorities so they can evaluate the impact of actions
- provide governors with accurate and timely information about the school's performance so they can use their developing skills to hold the headteacher to closer account
- reduce the reliance on external support by using this support to build greater capacity among school leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, both deputy headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a Local Leader of Education (LLE) from Barnfields Primary School. The discussions focussed upon the actions taken since the last inspection.

The school's action plan was evaluated and other documents, including records related to the management of the performance of teachers, information about improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the single central record and minutes of governing body meetings were scrutinised. Visits were also made to every classroom with the headteacher and one of the deputy headteachers. Brief discussions were held with pupils and work and displays were looked at during this time.

Context

Two teachers have left the school and two have joined since the last inspection. Two teachers are leaving the school at the end of term and, as a result of an additional class, three are joining. One of the deputy headteachers has assumed the leadership role in the Early Years Foundation Stage this half-term.

A core group, comprised of the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority link officer was formed before the last inspection. It has continued with its function of improving the school and now focuses upon the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The LLE joined this group after the last inspection and staff from her school have provided additional support to the school.

Main findings

The school's post Ofsted action plan covers the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report and lists specific action that will take place in the short term. However, there is no sense of a longer term plan, measurable milestones are not in place and it is not clear who is responsible for the actions and how they will be held to account. Progress is monitored at core group meetings so the Chair of the Governing Body is aware of developments but governors did not contribute to the writing of the plan and they are not systematically monitoring the impact of actions taken.

Members of the governing body visit the school regularly, link with particular areas and receive reports which cover most aspects of the school's work. They ask challenging questions at their meetings but they do not follow up these questions by asking for further information when required. Their skills are not fully developed so they are not yet able to hold the headteacher to close account.

The quality of provision in Early Years Foundation Stage declined after the last inspection. Working with the local authority and the LLE, school leaders took effective action to rectify this situation. Regular safety checks take place, action has been taken to improve the indoor and outdoor learning areas and, during a visit to nursery and reception classes, children were behaving in a way which supported learning. Consequently, evidence gathered during this inspection indicates that behaviour and safety have improved since concerns were raised.

Attitudes to learning were positive during the short visits to every classroom. There was evidence of more appropriate challenge for pupils of a range of abilities, including the most able. The books looked at during the inspection had been marked regularly and presentation of work has improved. Spelling, punctuation and grammar were corrected and staff modelled good use of spoken and written English. School leaders have taken some action to improve the accuracy of assessment but they are aware that this is still a significant area of development, particularly in Early Years Foundation Stage.

Progress is improving but, as a result of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching over time, achievement is not improving rapidly. For example, school records show that some pupils in the current Year 6 have made slow progress from where they started in Year 2. School leaders are also aware that, although the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has improved and the attainment gap is closing, those supported by the pupil premium are not making rapid progress so their attainment still lags behind that of other pupils.

External support

The local authority established the core group to support and challenge school leaders before the last inspection. This group, chaired by the local authority link officer, has maintained this function and has a significant role in driving the school to good.

The local authority officer is fully aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. She visits the school regularly and has commissioned support in a number of areas. For example the school has received support to improve outcomes in English, particularly reading, and mathematics. School staff have also benefited from effective support to develop behaviour management and the school has received considerable input to improve outcomes and provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The local authority commissioned the Local Leader of Education to work with school leaders. The LLE has provided considerable support and her staff have worked closely with teachers from Flash Ley Primary School. For example, the Early Years' Co-ordinator from Barnfields Primary School has effectively supported developments in the Early Years and Foundation Stage. She has taken part in joint lesson

observations, analysed school data and helped school staff to make improvements in this area.

Effective support has also been commissioned to develop governance in the school. Individual governors have attended training which has allowed them to begin to hold the headteacher to closer account through the use of questions. However, they do not yet have the skills to probe deeply into the information they are given nor are they asking for additional information to get a full understanding of the effectiveness of the school.

It is now time for school leaders to take more responsibility to drive the improvements in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority