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12 June 2015

Ms Nicky Brown
Headteacher
Ellington Infant School
High Street
St Lawrence
Ramsgate
Kent
CT11 0QH

Dear Ms Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ellington Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 March 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You led me on a tour of the school, including all classes. I examined a range of the school's documentation including your checks on the quality of teachers' work and pupils' progress. I looked in detail at the sample of pupils' work you provided.

Context

The staff has remained stable since the inspection. Two teachers are leaving at the end of the school year. You showed me evidence of your successful work to replace them.

Main findings

Leaders at all levels, including governors, have responded well and are taking effective action to address the recent inspection's findings. This extends the work that was underway, as school leaders already possessed a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You had been challenging weaker teaching prior to the inspection.

The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has improved considerably. This was necessary because pupils were not doing as well as they should. You have provided extensive training, led by local experts, which has encouraged teachers and other adults to plan, prepare and deliver very good phonics lessons. Pupils are more confident in lessons with the vast majority able to apply their learning appropriately for their age. You check carefully how well the new scheme is being used. This means that you are able to identify quickly any weaknesses that are developing. You are also swift to spot those who are falling behind. You now have available a range of strategies you can put in place to help pupils catch up if they need to. Teachers have responded well to all these changes and are now teaching effectively. Consequently standards are rising more quickly.

More able pupils are benefitting from the increasingly specific planning that teachers now undertake. Teachers are more aware of different groups in their classes and, for example, are setting work for the more able that is harder. It provides greater challenge because teachers have raised their expectations of what these more able pupils are able to achieve. Consequently more of them are on-track to attain higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1.

Teaching is improving because you have challenged teachers to raise expectations about what pupils know, understand and can do. This has been coupled with a challenge to the majority of teachers to have higher expectations of themselves. They are less reliant on work that has been pre-prepared for them by subject leaders. They work together to plan learning which is interesting and inspiring. The unplanned visit of a dragon produced many great learning opportunities for the pupils. Many members of staff were involved in ensuring that this activity worked well.

You provided me with ample evidence of the range of other actions you have taken to improve the overall quality of teaching. You have made some important appointments for the next academic year and are looking forward to welcoming some new colleagues.

Writing is improving because you are rightly holding teachers to account more robustly for the work their pupils are doing. You have provided considerable additional training to help teachers improve the quality of their performance. You have introduced the use of big ideas books successfully. These books provide pupils with the opportunity to practise their writing before they produce it finally for display or marking. As a result, they are more prepared to take risks. They are also developing a record of the improvements in their writing over time. It is now much easier to see how well they are progressing in their time in school. Many are now writing at length in a number of subjects, not just English. Good examples were seen in religious studies and science. You challenge teachers regularly on the standards of their work through regular progress meetings. The local authority advisor also holds you to account for this work, also in regular progress meetings.

You have very sensibly encouraged teachers to compare their pupils' work with that of others in other local schools. As a result teachers have even greater confidence that standards compare well. In the early years children make marks, form letters well and are increasingly able to produce whole words and some can write sentences.

Work in pupils' books compares well now with that of pupils of similar age in other schools locally and nationally. At the inspection some work was already good. Since the inspection the proportion that required improvement has reduced and there is much more that is consistently good.

The external review of governance recommended at the recent inspection has not yet taken place. It is scheduled for later in this term. However, the Chair of the Governing Body provided me with the governors' own self-evaluation of their effectiveness. This clearly indicates governors' growing effectiveness and their commitment to ongoing improvements in the school. Minutes of their meetings show that they provide you with regular challenge.

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

The local authority has provided a range of effective support to the school since the inspection. This builds on necessary work that was already underway. Support has been strong for the school's leaders overall, for improvements in the teaching of phonics and teaching and learning in general. There has been specific support for newly qualified teachers. The school's improvement advisor provides detailed notes of her visits. These notes clearly identify actions to be taken and also provide good guidance on how to achieve them. The school improvement advisor notes successes and any issues to be followed up. Much of this work happens in regular progress meetings which you find helpful and keep your focus sharply on the right things.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector