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Mrs Beth Gallagher
Headteacher
Elms Farm Community Primary School
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Sheldon
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Dear Mrs Gallagher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elms Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 January 2016, 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 April 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, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a national leader of education, who is providing support to the school, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated along with the school's self-evaluation, minutes of Interim Executive Board meetings and external evaluations of the school's effectiveness. I also joined you on a tour of the school, where we briefly visited several classrooms.

Context

Since the last inspection, two class teachers have joined the school and one has left. Three intervention teachers have also joined the school and their work focuses on literacy, numeracy and providing cover for class teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time.

The Interim Executive Board (IEB), which came into being on 1 September 2014, was replaced by a governing body on 1 January 2016. All five members of the IEB have moved on to the new governing body.

The school's published admission number increased from 45 to 60 in September 2013, and since this time, the school has experienced considerable instability in its pupil population. For example, in the last academic year, 70 pupils left the school and 100 joined.

Main findings

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and an increasingly effective senior leadership team, is very clear about what the school needs to do to secure a good, or better, judgement at its next inspection. Leaders demonstrate great effort and energy and are relentless in their drive to secure further progress for this improving school.

Leaders and governors are honest in their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are clear about those areas that still need to improve. As a result of this evaluation, leaders and governors have produced a detailed development plan that tackles all of the areas for improvement from the last inspection as well as other weaknesses that they have identified. Although the actions within the plan are clear, leaders' and governors' evaluation of impact focuses too much on what actions have been completed rather than on what difference they have made to pupils' progress and attendance.

Teaching is improving because leaders have targeted support and training for teachers on those areas that most needed to improve. Pupils are now carrying out more extended writing tasks, employing better spelling, punctuation and grammar as they do so. Pupils' basic mathematical skills are also improving, as teachers make this a particular element of all mathematics lessons. Leaders have also identified the teaching of reading as an area in need of improvement and, as a result, pupils are showing better inference and deduction in their reading and boys are reading more for pleasure.

Relatively new middle leaders have been effectively trained and developed by the headteacher and deputy headteacher and are rapidly becoming more independent and are driving improvement in their areas of responsibility. As a result, further school improvement is no longer over-reliant on the headteacher and her deputy

and the school's capacity to improve has been enhanced. At all levels, leaders show great commitment, enthusiasm and energy; a greater focus on measuring and evaluating the success of the actions being taken would help them to further refine and improve those actions and therefore maximise their future impact.

Attendance remains stubbornly below national figures despite a raft of strategies being employed by leaders, both to celebrate high attendance and to challenge poor attendance. Leaders do not currently analyse the impact of attendance interventions systematically to find out which are being most successful and which are not.

The IEB has provided effective support and challenge to school leaders over the past 16 months, bringing a high level of commitment and considerable expertise to their roles. They have successfully set the school's strategic direction and enabled the headteacher and other leaders to put this into practice.

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

Leaders receive very effective external support from the St Mary's Teaching School Alliance. A national leader of education, commissioned by the local authority following the inspection of October 2013, is still monitoring the school's performance. This now provides leaders with regular and robust challenge but also with helpful support and guidance. The St Mary's Teaching School Alliance is also providing effective training for Elms Farm's teachers.

In addition, school leaders have put in place external consultant support for middle leaders and this has contributed positively to their development and increasing autonomy and impact on the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority: The Executive Headteacher, St Mary's C. of E. Primary Academy, Hamsted Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B20 2RW