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Mr Tim Barnes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Barnes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Shapla Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 May 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection regarding improving the quality of governance. As a matter of urgency, immediate action should be taken to:

- complete the external review of governance as swiftly as possible and act on its findings promptly
- ensure that working relationships between the governing body and the headteacher are focused on monitoring the outcomes of the school's performance in addressing the areas requiring improvement to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the chair of the governing body and one other governor, other senior leaders, pupils and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement action plan was evaluated. You accompanied me on a series of short, focused visits to lessons. Examples of pupils' work were scrutinised. Documents that were looked at included the single central register, outcomes of monitoring activities, the impact of performance management, the minutes of governing body meetings and reports of visits from the local authority.

Context

No significant changes have been made since the previous inspection. Some teaching staff have been redeployed to different classes to make more use of their experience and expertise. The review of governance has not yet been completed.

Main findings

The quality of governance is a matter of serious concern. The governing body has been too slow to deal with the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. The external review of governance has not been completed. The limited working relationship between you and the governing body is putting the improvements being made for the pupils' education at risk of stalling. Although there are a few governors who take their responsibilities seriously, their attendance at training and meetings is too low. As a result, they have not established secure systems that hold senior leaders to account for the progress pupils make. Nor do they have an overview of what proportion of pupils are making expected or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, the governing body does not have a clear picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This is because the procedures for monitoring the strengths and weakness of teaching and learning are not systematically recorded in enough detail to provide secure information.

The plan for improving governance lacks sufficient detail. During our initial meeting, your version of the action plan for governance contained very little information. A second version of the plan was provided by the chair of the governing body when I met with him and another governor representative, but this was not fully formed. I recognise that you are concerned about the lack of progress, but you also informed me that you have not formally raised this concern with either the governing body or the local authority.

The difference in quality between the plans for improving governance and the other areas for improvement is stark. The sections relating to improving early years, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are fit for purpose. The plan has clear details of timescales and responsibilities, and specific actions are coloured red, amber or green to indicate how much impact the plans are having.

Despite the significant deficiencies in governance, the hard work of the teaching staff ably led by the deputy headteacher has had significant impact. The quality of children's writing in the early years provision has improved. Teachers plan interesting and exciting opportunities to stimulate children's imagination and interest. As a result, writing skills have improved since the time of the previous inspection. Children's work illustrates progress over time and this is supported by the accurate analysis of progress information by teachers and the literacy manager. During the inspection, children were excitedly writing out recipes. Other interesting work was seen, including 'caterpillar diaries' where children were able to practise their writing skills during a science topic.

Pupils' rates of progress in key stages 1 and 2 have increased since the previous inspection. This includes the work of the most able and girls. Subject leaders monitor pupils' work and are beginning to visit lessons more frequently. The school's analysis of pupils' progress demonstrates that the proportion of pupils making expected or better progress is increasing and the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing. However, the recording and analysis of the quality of teaching is not being analysed in enough detail. You recognise that this has hindered your ability to take any further action when teaching is weaker than expected.

Classrooms have a consistently strong focus on writing. 'Working walls' display high-quality examples of pupils' writing. Different styles of writing are on display. The impact is clear in pupils' books in which written work is tidy and legible. Teachers provide regular feedback and pupils who spoke to the inspector are proud of their work and said that teachers' comments are helpful. Pupils have also noticed the stronger emphasis on writing. Displays of writing in corridors around the school are attractive and provide good examples of different styles of writing. During the visits to lessons, Year 1 pupils were pleased with their books relating to 'Shapla Man'. Year 5 pupils' work was well presented and strong examples of spelling, grammar and punctuation were seen while the pupils were writing about 'myths and legends'.

Parents who spoke to the inspector were positive about the changes being made regarding standards of work, but raised some concerns about the quality and lack of frequent homework. Of particular worry to some parents was the difficulty they perceive in contacting senior managers. These concerns were reflected in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. A significant proportion of parents also stated they would not recommend the school to others.

I have serious concerns about the insufficiency of actions being taken by the governing body to hold the school to account, and the quality of communication between you and the governing body. 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's advisers have provided effective support for the improvements to the early years provision, the quality of teaching and the subject leadership of literacy. School staff have valued the subject expertise and feedback on their work, and this has led to recognisable progress against the relevant areas for improvement. However, it is of great concern to me that the external review of governance has not yet been completed, the governing body's action plan is incomplete and insufficient steps have been taken to improve this situation. As a result, the future improvement of the school towards becoming good is at risk of not being sustained.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tower Hamlets. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector