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19 July 2016

Mr Ivor Johnstone
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Dear Mr Johnstone

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lady Bankes Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils make consistently good progress beyond English and mathematics, particularly in science and computing
- embed recent changes to subject leadership so that all leaders can demonstrate the impact of their work on pupils' learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, newly qualified teachers, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held a telephone meeting with a senior local authority officer to discuss external support and challenge for the school. Together with your deputy headteacher, we visited a range of classes across the school to review the learning and progress of pupils. We also discussed the quality of work recorded in pupils' books across the school. I scrutinised information about attendance and pupils' behaviour, including bullying records and discriminatory language.

Context

Since my last monitoring visit in February 2015, the previous headteacher has left the school. You were appointed as interim headteacher in September 2015, following a period where senior leaders together covered the responsibilities of the headteacher role. Five teachers left the school in August 2015 and a further teacher left in May 2016. All teachers were replaced by new members of staff. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2016 after the previous postholder became a class teacher at the school. The school became part of a hard federation with Lady Bankes Infant School on 1 April 2016. As a result, the governing body was dissolved on 30 March 2016. A joint governing body was formed on 1 April 2016.

Main findings

Since your appointment in September 2015, you have injected a renewed sense of pride within Lady Bankes Junior School. You have been ably supported by your current deputy headteacher and together you have ensured higher expectations of what pupils and teachers can together achieve. With your staff and governors, you have ensured that everyone understands what needs to be improved. Staff and pupils can explain what has been achieved so far and how improvements in teaching are benefiting learning.

Together with your current deputy headteacher, you have opened up the school to learning from the best practice in teaching. You look for this both in the local authority and beyond. Following the recommended review of the pupil premium, you have drawn on a range of external expertise to drive improvements. Indeed you have gone well beyond London in search of the very best practice. This has been particularly effective in helping staff to focus on the needs of disadvantaged pupils. There is now very careful checking of how these pupils are performing. Where necessary, interventions are put in place to help these pupils catch up with their peers in school. This has helped to speed up the progress of individual pupils and ensure that more are attaining their potential.

You rightly identified that the school quickly needed to implement the new national curriculum, introduced nationally from September 2016. Work had begun on this in the term before your arrival. Together with your senior leaders, you have ensured that pupils are benefiting from a broad and high-quality curriculum. For example, Year 6 pupils talked to me about the key question they had recently been exploring, 'Did the second world war affect the lives of everyone in Britain?' High-quality work has emerged from exploring this question, including an essay demonstrating excellent vocabulary and an empathy for the people of the 1940s.

It is clear that mathematics has been developed since my last visit. There is now a greater emphasis on ensuring that pupils develop their confidence in written calculations. As a staff team, you have ensured that assessment information is used to plan more precisely to meet the needs of groups. The most able pupils are benefiting from raised expectations of how they can apply their learning. It is clear that they are expected to apply their secure mathematical understanding in individual lessons and across sessions. For example, Year 3 pupils were expected to discount shop prices following a 'flash sale' – the purpose, though, was to get to a formal written calculation. Pupils with less confidence were using more concrete and visual resources. In this way, all pupils were achieving the expectations of the new national curriculum. You accept that while pupils are being encouraged to explain how they tackle calculations orally, they are not regularly required to think why they have tackled problems in the way that they do. This more complex reasoning is an important part in ensuring that pupils are fully confident in their mathematics learning.

Pupils talk with pride about the improvements made in their home learning and their wider primary curriculum. As one Year 5 pupil explained, 'We no longer simply get worksheets. We are really made to think. Home learning helps our learning in class.' However, there is still work to be done to ensure that all areas of the curriculum, beyond English and mathematics, are of the same consistent quality. For example, while pupils are increasingly planning and conducting simple experiments in science, they are not developing consistently their ability to make scientific predictions or draw conclusions from their experiments. Equally, pupils report that computing is not stretching them beyond what they already know, saying, 'We do scratch programming but we can do this easily.' Leaders are aware of what needs to be done to further drive improvements in pupils' outcomes beyond English and mathematics.

Pupils are uniformly positive about the behaviour of their peers. They feel safe and understand how to report any concerns that arise. Bullying does occur on occasion, but this is well dealt with and leaders ensure that appropriate action is taken. Pupils report that behaviour is far more positive on the playground and that 'everyone now looks after each other'. There have been isolated incidents of racist and homophobic language. These have been resolutely dealt with to ensure no repetition.

Middle leadership is in the early stages of development. The English and mathematics leaders are beginning to take responsibility for leading and monitoring progress in their subjects. However, it is too early to see any impact from their work. You are aware that there is a need to now rapidly ensure that more staff take responsibility for driving improvements across the school. Governors are yet to have the opportunity of holding new leaders to account.

While preparing for this inspection, I identified that the child protection policy on the school's website was two years old. The school had drawn up a new policy in the autumn of 2015, but it was not uploaded onto the website until the inspection was announced. Leaders accept that they need to ensure that policies and documentation in the public domain are kept up to date and comply with the most up-to-date statutory guidance. The new policy is compliant with current national expectations. Staff have been trained in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. Staff understand the symptoms of potential abuse and neglect. Pupils themselves understand how to stay safe in school and beyond, including online.

The governing body was dissolved and replaced by a joint governing body with Lady Bankes Infant School in April 2016. This has helped to greatly deepen the level of expertise on the school's governing body. Overall, there has been a seamless transition between the two governing bodies, ensuring that no time has been wasted in getting to grips with the school's improvement priorities. An experienced chair and vice-chair of the governing body are providing firm challenge to leaders. They are ambitious and want to ensure that the pace of improvement is rapid so that all pupils can achieve their full potential.

External support

Since my last visit, the school has developed a constructive relationship with the local authority. As a team you welcome external challenge and view this as a key way of securing further improvement for the pupils at the school. The local authority has established a monitoring board, chaired by a senior local authority officer. The group, including the school's governors, meets each month. This is further holding school leaders to account for pupils' academic progress in all year groups. It also helps governors to more fully consider the impact of the school's plans for improvement.

The headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders from Lady Bankes Infant School have provided clear support to subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. The headteacher has undertaken joint monitoring of teaching, learning and individual classroom environments. This has helped to develop effective lines of communication between leaders and teachers at both schools. It is evident that this is helping to ensure that there is a shared understanding of learning and progress across both schools.

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

Yours sincerely

David Storrie
Her Majesty's Inspector