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Mrs Gill Simm
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Simm

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bellfield Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 2017, 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 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that governors act on the recommendations of the review of governance without delay to secure effective arrangements for governance which support and challenge school leaders
- ensure that leaders stabilise staffing as soon as possible so that developments to improve teaching, learning and assessment can be effectively embedded
- make sure that there is greater clarity in school improvement planning and that the school's self-evaluation is clear.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors including the chair of governors, a representative from Birmingham Education Partnership and advisers from St Mary's Teaching School Alliance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, as were other plans, the school's information about pupils' achievement and a parent questionnaire. I also accompanied the headteacher on brief visits to classrooms where I talked to pupils and looked at their books.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2016, five teachers have resigned. Two of these teachers finished at Easter and three will leave at the end of the summer term. Two seconded teachers from teaching school alliances replaced the two teachers that left at Easter. Three new teachers, including a new early years leader, will join the school in September 2017.

The chair of governors, who was appointed in September 2016, resigned at Easter. A new chair of governors was appointed in May 2017. Two parent governors ended their term of office this term, which has created vacancies. Three new governors have joined the governing body since the inspection in November 2016.

Main findings

- Leaders have not wasted any time in beginning to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. They have been highly focused on tackling weaknesses in teaching and have made a concerted effort to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders have rigorously monitored the quality of teaching and quickly provided feedback to teachers on what they need to do to improve their practice. However, sometimes leaders do not check to see that this advice is acted upon promptly by all teachers. This means that while the overall quality of teaching has improved, some inconsistencies remain.
- Where teaching is improving, there is greater challenge in learning for pupils, and work is more closely matched to their needs. Leaders have ensured a sharper focus on the achievement of the most able pupils. Teachers have provided more thought-provoking activities to support these pupils to make better progress. Provisional results for the end of key stage 1 for 2017 indicate a positive improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Your school's self-evaluation is combined with the post-inspection development

plan. However, this document does not state explicitly your view of the school's performance. The post-inspection development plan has reasonably clear objectives that are linked to the school's key priorities. However, because there are other whole-school action plans, there is some confusion between leaders, governors and external advisers over which is the priority, working plan. This hinders governors' and leaders' ability to accurately monitor and evaluate the work of leaders and the impact on pupils' progress.

- Leaders know the weaknesses in teaching and continue to be proactive in addressing these. For example, in Year 1, the teaching of phonics remains a concern. The provisional 2017 data for the proportion of pupils passing the Year 1 phonics check indicates that it has fallen slightly compared with last year's result. However, leaders have already identified this and taken action to improve the teaching of phonics. A new phonics programme has been purchased and is being rolled out in September 2017.
- The subject leader for mathematics has supported teachers well to improve the teaching of reasoning and problem solving. Pupils are being provided with more opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics. Work in books shows that pupils successfully apply their reasoning skills and logic when they encounter a new challenge.
- Leaders have made their expectations about the quality of teaching explicit. They have provided training, support and challenge to ensure that improvements are made. Teachers' performance management targets have been revised and they are more tightly linked to pupils' outcomes. As a result, teachers are being more closely held to account for the progress pupils make. School leaders rightly acknowledge that there is still further work to do in order for teaching and learning to be securely good. Some of the school's progress has been hampered by a significant amount of staff turnover.
- Pupils' written work shows the fastest rate of improvement in Year 2. This is because Year 2 teachers provide specific advice to pupils, which helps them to move on quickly in their learning. In other classes, teachers' feedback sometimes does not follow the school's marking policy. Leaders are aware of this and are actively supporting these teachers to ensure that they adopt the marking policy.
- Staff turnover in the early years has meant that improvements have been slower, although they have started to gather pace more recently. You are presently overseeing leadership of early years until the new leader starts in September 2017. My learning walk confirmed that, despite these staffing changes, there is now a better balance of adult-led learning and child-initiated activities. The provisional 2017 results for the proportion of children achieving a good level of development show a significant increase on the previous year's result. However, these still remain below last year's national average.
- The membership of the governing body has changed considerably in a short space of time. These changes have caused particular limitations in governance.

An external review of governance has been completed. However, following the publication of the draft report, governors waited far too long before acting on its recommendations. As a result, governors have not been in a strong position to support and challenge school leaders. However, a new chair of the governing body has recently been appointed. She has, ably supported by a vice-chair, brought a sense of urgency to addressing and implementing the recommendations. A recent governor day has given governors a renewed focus. New governors are fully committed and have a realistic view of the school's current performance.

External support

School leaders are making effective use of external support. The district lead for the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) has an accurate view of the school and has made a significant number of visits. She confirmed that leaders have a stronger understanding of measuring pupils' progress. BEP has also commissioned support from St Mary's Teaching School Alliance, which has provided effective support. BEP formally monitors the work of the school through district lead visits, which provide a good level of challenge and support.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill

Her Majesty's Inspector