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Simon Davies
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Dear Mr Davies

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Balfour Primary School

Following my visit with Shaun Jarvis, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 15 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- develop their approach to the teaching of phonics so that all pupils, including the weakest readers, make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations.

Context

Staffing has been stable since the last inspection. A new chair of the governing body took up post in April 2021.

Main findings

You and your leadership team have continued to work with focus to improve the school. You have done your utmost not to allow the pandemic to delay you. You have developed a very clear vision of the education that you want pupils at Balfour Primary School to receive. To achieve this vision, leaders have developed detailed curriculum plans for each subject. Teachers are beginning to embed these new curriculum plans in classrooms and, as a result, pupils are now excited about their learning. You continue to work to ensure that teachers develop their knowledge of the subjects they teach and how best to teach them. Leaders are carrying out regular checks to ensure that the quality of education that pupils receive is improving.

You are determined that the school's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Considerable progress has been made here. We saw teachers in many classes making sensible adaptations to their lessons to ensure that every pupil was being supported to learn and remember more of the subject they were studying. Leaders are now focusing on ensuring that this support happens consistently in every class and in every subject.

You have worked to strengthen the reading curriculum and to promote a love of reading. Leaders have carefully selected the books that pupils read across the school to ensure that pupils read rich texts from a range of genres. Pupils in all classes are supported to talk about books and stories and share their reading experiences. These discussions help to further broaden all pupils' reading horizons and encourage those who may have previously been more reluctant to read. Pupils that we spoke with were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the books they had read, and confident in sharing their own reading preferences. Pupils appreciated the wide range of reading opportunities on offer at school. For example, older pupils talked with enthusiasm about the audio-book club.

The teaching of phonics is not yet as good as it needs to be, particularly for the weakest readers. This is because leaders have not yet implemented a coherent phonics programme that provides all staff with a good level of support, guidance, resources and training. As a result, the phonics lessons we saw did not help Reception children or key stage 1 pupils to develop their phonics knowledge as well as they should have. In addition, not all staff knew how to support the weakest readers to make sufficient progress. You are currently working in partnership with other local schools to identify a phonics programme that will best meet the needs of

your pupils and ensure that staff develop the expertise they need so that that every pupil will learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities.

Governors have great confidence in you and your leadership team. They recognise and value the work that you have done to unify the school, particularly in creating a culture of high expectations for every pupil, including pupils with SEND. Governors work with you to review your action plans and ensure that you are focusing on the right priorities for the school. They provide both challenge and support to you and your leadership team, including ensuring that the well-being of staff is a priority.

Additional support

You and your leadership team have engaged extremely well with a range of support that has been provided by the local authority, including support from a national leader of education. This has helped you to address the key areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. Your executive inclusion coordinator has benefited from peer support from a special educational needs coordinator in a local school. This has helped her to implement clear systems to identify, support and monitor the progress of pupils with SEND.

Evidence

During the inspection, we held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

In addition, we reviewed the school development plan and other related documents. We scrutinised curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' books and listened to pupils reading to a familiar adult. We reviewed the single central register of checks on adults and discussed safeguarding processes and procedures with the staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Alice Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector