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14 September 2021

Sarah Wawn
Headteacher
Harlesden Primary School
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Dear Ms Wawn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harlesden Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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 a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

- ensure that all books that pupils are given when learning to read are matched closely to the sounds they know, so that they can become fluent readers more quickly.

Context

Since the last inspection, two additional assistant headteachers have been appointed, one from within the school. One has since left. The deputy headteacher is moving on in September to take up a headship. From September, one of the current assistant headteachers will take over as deputy headteacher.

New governors and a new clerk to the governing body have also been appointed since the last inspection.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you and senior leaders have supported curriculum leaders in establishing well-sequenced schemes of work. Some commercial programmes have been bought, as a starting point. These have been adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Opportunities for pupils to repeat and practise important skills and knowledge are clear in curriculum plans for history, science, art, and design and technology.

Pupils' learning is checked during lessons. Opportunities are provided for pupils to recall key facts, so that these become part of their long-term memory. For example, in science, pupils were learning about sound. Before investigating how sound travels using a string telephone, pupils were asked to recall what they already knew about sound waves.

The implementation of these curriculum plans is not as advanced in other subjects. In particular, assessment in art and in design and technology does not fully take into account what pupils have previously learned. You and subject leaders recognise this, and you already have plans in place to embed assessment in these subjects.

Curriculum development has been strengthened further through collaboration with local secondary schools. This has included partnership work with their subject specialists. As a result, subject leaders have grown in confidence. In particular, it has improved their understanding of the key subject knowledge that pupils need to learn.

You are ambitious for pupils to access all learning through being strong, confident and fluent readers. You stated that pupils engaged well with 'live' online lessons during lockdown. You also told me that gaps in phonic knowledge are still apparent due to COVID-19 disruption, but you have adapted phonics provision to help pupils catch up quickly.

The approach to teaching phonics is now consistent across the early years and key stage 1. When pupils are given decodable books that match the sounds they know, they demonstrate fluency in their reading. Teachers also use 'book bands' to select pupils' reading books. However, this is not helping pupils to become better readers

because teachers do not make sure that these books are closely aligned to pupils' phonics knowledge.

Additional support

You have been proactive in seeking support from the local authority representatives, Brent Teaching School Alliance, Brent Schools Partnership and the Harlesden Cluster. You have also made links with local secondary schools. This has meant that your subject leaders are well trained and supported with planning their new curriculum. You reported that this partnership has been valuable. It has supported you to produce clear subject plans. It has also helped you to write a subject leader handbook to further support the work of subject leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant heads and subject leaders. I also met with representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

In addition, I visited phonics lessons, as well as hearing pupils read in Reception and Year 1. I scrutinised school improvement plans and leaders' self-evaluation, and reviewed curriculum-planning documents. I also visited lessons and sampled pupils' books in science, history, art, and design and technology. I considered the views of parents and staff through Ofsted's surveys.

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

Yours sincerely

Samantha Ingram
Her Majesty's Inspector