

14 July 2009

Mrs J Keelan
Headteacher
Barrington Primary School
Barrington Road
Bexleyheath
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Dear Mrs Keelan

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 July 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the pupils and parents who spoke to me and to the local authority adviser.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- as a matter of urgency, improve the provision in the Foundation Stage so that the children make the progress of which they are capable
- improve and sharpen its self-evaluation
- provide challenging academic targets that raise expectations and set out precisely what pupils need to learn next
- seek to ensure that all parents feel their opinions and any concerns are taken seriously
- improve pupils' opportunities to learn independently and to be more actively involved in lessons.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Children join the school with the knowledge, skills and understanding that are expected for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, they now make good progress because the school has directed considerable attention to this area. In the Reception class, there is now a systematic cycle of assessment which informs teachers' planning and helps to ensure children make good progress. The Reception classroom is a calm, orderly place where children are able to work maturely, with concentration, in groups. When choosing their own tasks, they demonstrate good independent learning skills and eagerly get involved in the well-thought-out activities available to them. Staff are effective in modelling good language skills for pupils and directing their learning when necessary. Good systems have been set up to share

information between the teachers and other adults involved in supporting the learning of teachers. Planning is detailed, with clear focus on groups of children. It does not always make explicit, however, the individual children on whom staff may need to focus as a result of previous assessment. The Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator is very well informed about the needs and progress of each child.

By the end of Key Stage 1, the standards pupils reach in reading, writing and mathematics are average. Although the proportion reaching the higher levels has increased, targets were not met and the school recognises there is more work to do here. By the end of Key Stage 2, unvalidated data show that attainment is higher than last year in mathematics and science and that the proportion of pupils gaining the highest levels in both these subjects has increased substantially. In English, attainment declined; however, the school is requesting the re-marking of some test papers. Pupils' achievement across the school is satisfactory.

There is now a detailed timeline in place to check the work of the school. This is helpful in providing an overview of the activities senior leaders will be undertaking. However, the role of middle leaders in checking the work of the school is underdeveloped. While a programme to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning exists, the school's view of the teaching of individuals is still over-generous. As a result, a clear overview of the weaknesses in teaching which need to be addressed in a systematic way is not yet in place. Key issues, such as the challenge for pupils and the pace of learning in lessons, remain areas that require further development. Helpful systems to improve the quality of teaching, such as 'buddying' of teachers, are in place but the focus of this developmental work is not sharp. Teaching assistants provide good support through questioning, to ensure pupils are engaged in learning and are making progress; however, they are sometimes underused in lessons. Moderation of pupils' work is now more systematic and whole-school awareness is beginning to emerge about the key skills pupils must acquire at each level. This is also helped by working with other local schools. Time for teachers to discuss and review the progress of pupils with their next teacher is helpful in ensuring continuity, but the need remains to accelerate pupils' progress and to increase the level of challenge.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent and teachers have created calm, work-focused environments. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. However, teachers are not always skilled in planning learning which challenges pupils in their thinking and it does not yet enable pupils to take more control of their learning. Sometimes, activities restrict pupils' ability to show what they can really achieve. Pupils are still, too often, all working on the same task, with little differentiation for differing abilities. Alternatively, where pupils are grouped, these groups are not fluid in enabling pupils to work at higher levels. There are examples of good teaching in the school which challenge and enthuse pupils, as a result of careful planning, probing questioning and engaging activities.

Senior leaders have investigated different methods to monitor progress and are in the process of embedding one clear system that all staff will use for monitoring pupils' progress. As a result, although analysis is being undertaken regularly, not all staff fully understand the process or are able to use it. Pupils are set challenging targets and termly assessments are used to check their progress, which is then reported to parents. The termly progress meetings with the headteacher and the class teacher to review pupils' progress is helpful in ensuring underachieving pupils are given support when they need it. For pupils on intervention programmes or with learning difficulties, the review is, sensibly, undertaken more frequently. Most pupils understand the levels at which they are working and know that teachers give them targets in order to improve. Different teachers review these targets in different ways and clear guidance to teachers on how to do this is not evident. Some teachers' marking gives clear guidance to pupils on how to improve; however, sometimes it just acknowledges the skills they have acquired rather than guiding their next steps in learning. Where formative marking is apparent, it is not always clear how pupils act on the advice they have been given.

Senior leaders have responded to the concerns of some parents regarding communication with the school. There are now termly progress meetings in place to discuss children's progress with parents. Senior leaders have also implemented clear policies in responding to parental communications and are now deliberately more visible around the school. However, there remain groups of parents who are very supportive of the school and others who are more critical.

Senior leaders have valued the support provided by the local authority, which includes supporting senior leaders in evaluating the work of the school. The impact of this support has been good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and satisfactory overall.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector