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14 May 2013

Mr K Burgess
Squirrels Heath Junior School
Salisbury Road
Romford
RM2 5TP

Dear Mr Burgess

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Squirrels Heath Junior School, Havering

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, teaching staff, the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plans, records of teaching and pupils' achievement data were evaluated. Informal discussions were held with pupils and guided reading lessons were observed.

Context

In April, two permanent assistant headteachers were appointed. One has responsibility for leading on improvements in mathematics. Also, a part-time mathematics teacher has been appointed to support Year 6. The deputy headteacher will leave at the end of July 2013 and plans are underway to appoint a replacement. The school is working in partnership with a local good school to improve teaching in mathematics.

Main findings

Much work has been undertaken by senior leaders to address the areas requiring improvement identified in the previous inspection. As a result, pupils' rates of progress are accelerating. The pupil progress meetings held with teachers are making a significant difference to how quickly and effectively underachievement is identified and dealt with. In addition to this, checking of assessment information is thorough. Strategies to support pupils are well-thought through and include targeted booster lessons for those most in need of support. The guided reading lessons have been revised to provide more individual support for weaker readers to take place at the same time. These lessons are well structured and use a range of activities to engage pupils in reading accurately. However, closer attention needs to be paid to pupils left to work independently, so that they use their time effectively. The additional reading comprehension lessons for all pupils are used effectively to support the school's drive to improve reading.

The new assistant headteachers are making good contributions to the school's work, especially in mathematics. The calculation policy has been revised and work has begun to support teachers. However, while plans to observe and assess the impact of these initiatives are identified they have not yet taken place. Teachers say that they have had strong support to improve their teaching, but it is too early to identify the full impact on pupils' achievement. The partnership work with the local school is contributing to teachers working better in teams to share their planning and good practice in mathematics.

Actions identified in the development plan are relevant and cover all areas for improvement from the previous inspection. However, some lack tangible outcomes. Leaders responsible for improvements are not always named; for example, too many actions are to be undertaken collectively. Although dates for the completion of tasks are clearly identified, too often, review dates are missing.

The governing body is knowledgeable about the challenges the school faces. They ask pertinent questions of how well the school is improving, and understand the progress made in relation to improving teaching. However, they are not checking the school's development plan thoroughly enough, especially the actions to improve pupil progress. Training to understand school performance is required so that they are better placed to support and challenge the school.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure that all actions identified in the development plan are linked to measurable success criteria that are reviewed regularly

- ensure that the governing body checks and evaluates that actions identified in the development plan lead to pupils' making better progress over time. Governors should also become more knowledgeable about pupils' performance data so that they can challenge school leaders more effectively.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Efficient monitoring by the local authority has helped school leaders quicken their efforts to improve pupils' achievement. The commissioning of the partnership with a local school has helped to improve the teaching in mathematics. The partner school is supporting Squirrels Heath very well. For example, joint work is helping teachers to use peer observation accurately to assess their quality of teaching. The partnership is also building the capacity of some senior leaders to support teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Havering.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter will be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Director of Children's Services for Havering