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John Kidney
Headteacher
Alfred Street Junior School
Alfred Street
Rushden
Northamptonshire
NN10 9YS

Dear Mr Kidney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alfred Street Junior School, Rushden

Following my visit to your school on 26 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 on 24 April 2013. 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- assess pupils' home reading, following up on pupils who are not reading sufficiently with adults, and support staff to develop high quality in-school guided reading sessions
- develop the skills of the senior leadership team in monitoring and accurately evaluating teaching and learning in lessons
- develop the governing body in contributing to school self-evaluation and prioritising its own role in school improvement
- update the school improvement plan with more precise progress targets for pupils, which are also incorporated into sharp performance management targets for staff.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the inclusion team, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. School and external monitoring activities were looked at and the performance management of staff was discussed.

Context

There have been no significant contextual changes in school since the section 5 inspection.

Main findings

All staff are committed to ensuring the school is judged to be good at its next inspection. Decisive action was taken in September to re-arrange pupils in academic groupings which better meet their learning needs. This ensures pupils benefit from a high level of challenge and support appropriate to their abilities. There are new discrete lessons on the sounds that letters make and for guiding reading. School leaders know that they must judge the quality of these initiatives directly on the progress pupils make in reading and writing, and on whether they are successfully addressing any underachievement. New home-school reading records have been introduced, but there is no system in place to monitor how much reading each pupil is engaging in at home.

The performance of staff is currently based on whole school targets and is not closely enough aligned to the required accelerated levels of progress for each pupil or group of pupils. The headteacher and members of the governing body are intending to address this in new systems for performance management later this term. Higher expectations and more stable staffing are already beginning to impact on standards, as early indications from current data are that more pupils than previously are on track to reach the nationally expected levels. However, the school knows it must be relentless in securing all pupils' good progress, especially in reading and mathematics.

The governing body are continually strengthening. They are rightly focussed on their role in school improvement and on raising standards. Further training undertaken by new governors and clearly defined roles and responsibilities ensures that they are giving adequate challenge to the school. However, their involvement in school self-evaluation and action planning is at a very early stage. The governing body has not yet been wholly successful in developing partnerships with the main feeder infant school, which is essential for senior leaders to align procedures for learning and streamline transition between both schools.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Senior leaders have been pro-active in sourcing external support. High quality training has given insight to the headteacher and to some of the teaching staff, which has improved the quality of teaching and the effectiveness with which the quality of teaching is monitored. The headteacher is forging strategic partnerships with other local good and outstanding schools in order to improve practice. This is helping the school to develop more effective organisational systems to aid accurate self-evaluation. The local authority has maintained its commitment to evaluating school effectiveness. The school recognises it needs to continue to access external support, and particularly in pursuing support from the local authority in developing closer working with the feeder infant schools, which it has been struggling to achieve.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector