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Ms L Khalil
Headteacher
Heston Primary School
Heston Road
Hounslow
TW5 0QR

Dear Ms Khalil

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heston Primary School

Following my visit to your school with Cathy Anwar HMI on 27 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are now taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve the sharpness of lesson planning and delivery, especially in Years 1 to 4, so that all pupils receive work more tightly matched to their assessed learning needs
- ensure the new mathematics subject leader has access to expert subject-specific advice.

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the local authority and the Governing Body to discuss the action taken by the school. I also evaluated documentation, including data showing the progress and attainment of pupils. We made brief visits together to each class and looked at pupils' work.

Context

Several new teaching staff, including a new assistant headteacher, began work at the school in September 2013.

Main findings

After the very turbulent past year, reported in my previous letters, you now say that you are 'cautiously optimistic' about the school's situation. I agree with you. The school is not certain of becoming good by the time of its next inspection, but it has a chance. Since the spring and early summer, there has been a real shift of thinking. You have listened carefully to the local authority, your governors and me, demonstrating considerable resilience and commitment. You now lead the school much more firmly and, creditably, involve many others in leadership. School leaders are better focused, more ambitious, and clear thinking in the most important areas. You inducted new staff this term carefully, so they know what the priorities are. There is evidence of notable improvement in teaching, the curriculum and pupils' progress. Now, in our conversations, we are considering how to refine systems, which are working. In the past, we had to discuss fundamental change.

The deputy headteacher manages and evaluates assessment data very well. Pupils' work is now assessed accurately. New senior leaders are making strong contributions. In mathematics, the new interim subject leader has put in place a strong and inventive plan to bring needed improvement. However, he is not a mathematics specialist and it is right that subject-specific support should be arranged for him. Other subject leaders ensure a broad curriculum with all subjects having their place. I was pleased, for example, to note the priority given to physical education, art and music. It was very good to see that younger pupils had responded creatively and with such interest to compositions by Stravinsky, Britten and Grieg. A Year 5 class played recorders together accurately, using notation helpfully.

Lessons engage and interest pupils. Some lessons are, valuably, outdoors. Teachers ask better questions to challenge pupils' thinking. I also noted student teachers contributing skilfully in lessons. We discussed and agreed that, in Years 1 to 4 in particular, you need to ensure that work set by teachers is sharply focused on meeting the precise, assessed, learning needs of each pupil. In lessons observed today, for example, pupils enjoyed writing instructions and captions in stimulating, lively activities. We saw talk being well used to improve pupils' vocabulary and confidence, of particular benefit to those for whom English is not the first language. But pupils' individual learning needs in respect of grammar, letter formation, punctuation and spelling were not as well addressed through these activities as they might have been. This more focused work appears better established in older year groups.

There remains a legacy of underachievement. For example, pupils currently in Years 2, 4 and 6 are at levels in writing and mathematics below where they should be. Year 4 pupils have not all made sufficient progress so far this year, as your excellent tracking systems show. Year 6 pupils, on the other hand, have made a strong start to the year, beginning to catch up lost ground.

In 2013, assessment results in English and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 were close to national average, and sometimes above. Many pupils made the expected progress and some did very well, but there were gaps too. For example, boys' writing remains underdeveloped and mathematics results dropped in Year 6. The results of the phonics tests in Key Stage 1, which indicate how well pupils can link letters and sounds, were below average. Reception pupils' results were below average, but many children had made rapid progress from their starting points. Your self-evaluation of all of these areas is apt, and you and other leaders have put suitable plans in place, which are being carefully acted upon, to address the weaknesses. The proof of the success of this will be in improved outcomes for pupils.

The governing body continues to contribute very well, helping to shape the school's improvement. Its chair and vice chair are astute, supportive and very challenging to you and the senior staff. They deserve much credit for the positive change in the school. They are also transforming the governing body itself, expecting more from individual governors, recruiting new members carefully and ensuring that governors' visits to the school are well focused on important matters.

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

The progress made reflects very well on the formidable contribution and commitment of local authority officers. As part of a wider review across the borough, the local authority has placed the school on an intensive support programme, as it requires improvement. However, officers are rightly clear that the school must manage itself; the local authority's correct role now is to monitor and hold the school to account closely, advising and influencing its development from a greater distance.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector