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21 January 2014

Nicky Godetz
Headteacher
Cypress Primary School
Cypress Road
London
SE25 4AU

Dear Ms Godetz

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cypress Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2014, 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 in October 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:

- Strengthen the action plan by making clear how leaders and governors will monitor it, and outline with greater clarity the success criteria at each checkpoint to ensure the effectiveness of actions is accurately evaluated.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the heads of the Infant and Junior schools, other senior leaders, your year group leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, two governors and two representatives from the local authority to discuss the actions

being taken to improve the school. I spoke informally with some parents and met with a small group of Year 2 and 6 pupils to discuss their work. I evaluated your school development and post-Ofsted action plans and reviewed other relevant documentation. I joined you on a tour of both sites and in brief visits to the lessons of almost all pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection an additional class teacher, teaching assistant and lunchtime supervisor have been appointed to teach the seven Reception-aged children who have been admitted into a new class. The South Norwood Hill Children's Centre, based on the infant site has been de-designated with the school continuing to run some services. Staff have been redeployed in the school.

Main findings

You and leaders at all levels have wasted no time in working to move the school forward at pace. Your determined and focused leadership, honest self-evaluation and strong team working are at the heart of the relentless drive for improvement. As a result, morale is high and there is a real sense of everyone working together. You have rightly decided to keep the school development plan which already identified writing and use of pupil premium funding as areas for improvement. Consequently, improving the quality of teaching, the third area of improvement, is central to the post-Ofsted action plan.

Teachers at all levels have used the inspection report to gain a precise understanding of what is working well, and where there are inconsistencies and areas to develop. As a result, actions are appropriate. They are phased so that teachers do not have too many initiatives to deal with and can develop their practice. For example, development of extended writing and the curriculum, while planned, have yet to be undertaken. Overarching success criteria are given but how senior leaders and governors will monitor them, and evaluate the impact of success measures, especially at interim checkpoints, lack detail.

The school is making very good use of its strengths and in-house expertise to develop the skills and effectiveness of teachers and teaching assistants. Senior leaders have already disseminated to teachers and teaching assistants their 'talk for writing' training. We saw evidence of teachers very effectively using this approach. Early evaluations indicate this is leading to improvements in the quality of writing. In-house training is helping teachers make better use of assessment information to focus more on pupils' learning and use questioning more effectively. Greater emphasis is being placed on the key skills every pupil must achieve by the end of each year. Pupils in Year 6 are trialling new and more structured target setting sheets. They say this is helping them to improve quickly because they are easier to

follow and understand what they need to do. School performance information for the end of the autumn term indicates better rates of progress, and gaps between identified groups and classes starting to close.

Following discussions with teachers the arrangements for lesson observations are changing to three-day review periods to ensure senior leaders gain a view of typical teaching. School records show that much of teaching is good or better. Nonetheless the school is working actively to ensure all teaching is of the highest quality. All teachers have undertaken a self-review audit of their strengths and areas for development, verified in discussion with their year group leader. Sharing of good practice and coaching are then helping them deliver more consistently good or better teaching. The small amount of teaching that requires improvement is being tackled rigorously.

Staff at all levels are being held to greater account for the performance of pupils. Leadership is being strengthened with the eight Year Group Leaders are using extra release time taking greater responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement in their teams. Consideration is being given to monitoring the impact of interventions and targeted support for individuals and groups of pupils. Year and inclusion teams are sharpening their approach to meeting the needs of the whole child to better support the academic performance of the most vulnerable. Staff have a greater awareness of the most vulnerable pupils in their classes, including those supported by pupil premium funding. As a result year teams are now identifying and acting to address particular needs, for example the provision of additional after school clubs.

Governors are highly committed, very supportive and equally determined to see the school become good. Their termly review days provide the opportunity to see the work of the school first hand. Their very good grasp of school performance information enables them to provide strong challenge and effectively hold the school to account.

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 local authority support is appropriate. It has helped to identify similar schools for teachers to visit to observe good and outstanding practice, and has provided funding to increase the effectiveness of middle leaders. A new School Improvement Partner has been appointed. She has familiarised herself with the school's strengths and areas of development and has outlined the support that the local authority can provide. The school is continuing to work with the North Croydon Cluster of five primary schools to moderate and ensure accuracy of assessments in English,

mathematics and science and share good practice. The school is making use externally provided professional development which is carefully matched to its development priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector