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Adam Hickman
Head of School
Ashmole Primary School
Ashmole Street
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Dear Mr Hickman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ashmole Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 2014. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and the head of school, groups of teachers and governors and a representative from the local authority. I met with the leader responsible for English and mathematics; together with her and the head of school, I reviewed a sample of pupils' work. The head of school accompanied me on short visits to each classroom where I spoke with pupils and looked at their work. I scrutinised the central record of recruitment checks.

Context

There has been a significant change to leadership since the last inspection. Following the resignation of the previous headteacher, the governing body was not able to appoint a headteacher of sufficient quality, despite two rounds of recruitment. The school has joined the Wyvern Federation on a temporary basis, until August 2017, under the leadership of an executive headteacher and a head of school. The executive headteacher is a national leader of education and leads the Wyvern Federation. One teacher became part-time in February having previously worked full-time. A teacher new to the school joined the staff at the same time. One teaching assistant left the school in February.

Main findings

The recently appointed executive headteacher and head of school are providing purposeful and clear leadership. In the short period since their appointment they have successfully raised expectations of what can be achieved by pupils at Ashmole. They have introduced much needed structure and detail to processes for school improvement. Rightly, their starting point has been to ensure that the quality of teaching for all pupils is raised. They have a clear vision and a coherent, strategic plan which addresses the key issues. Leaders have capitalised on the support available from colleagues across the federation. This has added significantly to the school's capacity for improvement, enabling efficient and effective sourcing of support as required.

The head of school's regular checks on the quality of teaching give him an accurate understanding of each teacher's developmental needs. Teachers receive detailed feedback about their practice, following formal and frequent informal visits to their classrooms. Training needs are addressed promptly, either through generic training for all staff, or through bespoke training provided by school leaders or colleagues at the other federation schools. The head of school checks that the training each teacher receives, leads to improved practice in the classroom. The profile of phase leaders has been raised, and their role clarified. This has improved communication between senior leaders and teachers as well as providing additional capacity for improving the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers and subject leaders are clear about what is expected of them. Morale is high; teachers appreciate the clear guidance they are now receiving. They take greater responsibility for pupils' progress and have a sharper focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

Training about questioning has led to teachers asking more searching questions during lessons so that they gain a clearer picture of pupils' understanding. Well-chosen questions also provide opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking more fully. This is helping to deepen their conceptual understanding, particularly in mathematics. A review of pupils' books shows that teachers are now scrutinising

work in greater depth, with higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage now provides more structured opportunities for children to develop a better grasp of the key skills they need in readiness for Year 1. For example, skilful questioning supported children in Reception to compare the relative weights of items, using appropriate mathematical vocabulary to explain their decision making.

Information about the progress pupils make is now collected and reviewed more frequently. This ensures that leaders have more reliable data on which to base their decision making. Pupils falling behind are now identified at an earlier stage so that appropriate support is provided in a timely manner. The effectiveness of the programmes of support for these pupils is tracked carefully to ensure that they are having the intended impact. Expectations have been raised for more able pupils. Tasks are now chosen more carefully so that pupils tackle more challenging work. For example, during a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils applied their knowledge of area to calculate the surface area of cardboard boxes. Additional provision has been made for pupils in Year 6 intending to take the higher level papers in the 2015 national tests.

Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is being targeted more appropriately to ensure that it impacts on pupils' achievement. While the leader responsible for inclusion has an overview of disadvantaged pupils' achievement, individual teachers are now clear that it is their responsibility to ensure that these pupils make the expected progress. The recommended review of pupil premium spending has been completed and the recommendations acted upon quickly by leaders.

Governors now have pupils' achievement firmly at the top of their agenda. They have already noted the benefits associated with membership of the federation. They are acutely aware of the need to satisfy themselves about the reliability of the data with which they are presented. They have adopted a more thorough and robust approach to their roles, benefitting from liaison with other governors in the federation. They understand the need for more regular scrutiny of pupil progress information. Reports from subject leaders and clearly presented data about pupils' progress give them a clear picture of the impact of the school's work. They have a good appreciation of the positive impact on staff and pupils of the leadership of the executive headteacher and head of school. A review of governance has recently been completed; the recommendations are being incorporated into a governors' action plan.

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 has provided effective support in brokering the link between the school and the Wyvern Federation. Senior leaders and specialist leaders of education from the federation provide effective and highly valued support. The local authority monitors the school's progress through half termly action group meetings and termly visits to the school by the linked school improvement adviser. Governors have received training in the interpretation and use of pupil attainment and progress data. As a result, they have a clearer understanding of the information they need to make informed decisions.

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

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Loukes
Her Majesty's Inspector