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26 January 2016

Mrs Sally Reay
Headteacher
River Bank Primary School
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Dear Mrs Reay

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to River Bank Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 January 2016, 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 July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair and two other members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plans were evaluated and we observed teaching and learning throughout the school together. I looked at a range of school documents and checked the school's single central record.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in July 2015 the school has almost doubled in size. There are now two classes in Year 2, three classes in Year 1 and four classes in the Reception Year. There have been a large number of changes to staffing at the school. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for the early years left the school at the end of the last academic year and a new deputy headteacher joined the school in September. Almost all the teaching staff are new to the school, including three who are newly qualified. A new attendance and welfare officer post has been created and the school has changed its information management system.

Main findings

You and the governors were not surprised that the school was judged to require improvement when it was inspected in July 2015. You accepted the judgement immediately, wrote an action plan and made a prompt start to addressing the issues identified by the last inspection. The governing body have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and fully appreciate the need for rapid improvement.

The action plan addresses all the areas for improvement from the inspection in July. It includes a range of suitable actions, identifies people responsible for their implementation and includes timescales for when they are planned to take place. The milestones document provides a useful overview and timeline. The termly plan for autumn 2015 has been thoroughly reviewed using a traffic-light system to indicate the extent to which each point has been successfully actioned.

The action plan would be improved by making the milestones measurable. This would allow governors to monitor more precisely whether the school is achieving its aims and to ensure that progress is on track. In parts, the document is too descriptive making it difficult to 'see the wood for the trees'.

The new leadership structure is starting to become established and leadership is clearly now more widely distributed. Leaders are now in place for both English and mathematics and there is a new leader for the early years. You have ensured that a good range of support is in place to enable these new leaders to develop both their leadership roles and their areas of responsibility.

The new early years leader does not have class teacher responsibility and this is enabling her to focus on developing the quality of teaching in the early years and improving provision as a whole. You told me that teachers now have a greater understanding of the early years curriculum and of the characteristics of learning for very young children. You said that children's play in the early years is now more purposeful and that was certainly the case when I observed.

In order to improve pupils' phonics knowledge and skills (the relationships between letters and sounds) you have introduced a commercial teaching scheme. You arranged for all staff to have appropriate training to implement the scheme and you reported that it is already having a noticeable impact on both the quality of teaching and on outcomes for pupils. I saw evidence of pupils using their phonics skills well during my visit.

You have introduced a new marking system to improve the feedback that pupils receive about their work. Pupils' exercise books show clearly that teachers throughout the school have adopted the system and are using it consistently. However, you are aware that improvements in marking are in their infancy and the system is not yet having the desired impact on pupils' progress.

Pupils' attendance so far this year is below the national average and requires improvement. A new attendance officer has recently been appointed and it is important that there is now a strong focus on raising attendance and reducing absence.

The school's single central record does not meet statutory requirements and this must be remedied as a matter of urgency. The single central record that was in use at the time of the last inspection has been abandoned and two other documents now stand in its place. Neither document contains all necessary personnel or all necessary information. Although there is no suggestion at this stage that proper checks have not been made, it is essential that the requirements detailed in the statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* are met. I will make an unannounced visit to the school in one month's time to check that this has been done.

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

External support

A good range of support is being provided to the school. The governors arranged for a school improvement adviser from the local authority to provide you with support. The adviser has clearly provided useful guidance and advice in helping you to write an appropriate action plan and evaluate its progress. Appropriate support is being provided to improve leadership in English, mathematics and the early years.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of Active Luton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector