

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



31 October 2016

Sue Simmons
Headteacher
Thornton Primary School
Thornton Road
Ward End
Birmingham
West Midlands
B8 2LQ

Dear Mrs Simmons

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 October 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 October 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure new staff continue to have the training and support required to help them improve and embed their practice
- ensure that teachers have the same high expectations of learning across the curriculum as those found in English and mathematics
- provide governors that are new to post with further training to help them offer a greater level of challenge and support.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Joint observations with leaders were conducted in every year group. I scrutinised a range of documents including plans for staff training, pupil assessment information and the school's self-evaluation. I analysed the monitoring programme that leaders use to check on improvements at Thornton Primary. I also reviewed the school's single central record and the contents of some personnel files.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes in staffing. Several teachers left the school in July 2016. Eight newly qualified teachers joined the school in September 2016. The school's deputy headteacher is temporarily supporting the leadership of another local school. Governors have appointed two new assistant headteachers to oversee the early years foundation stage and the development of the curriculum.

Main findings

At the last inspection, leaders and governors were asked to develop a number of areas. These areas are set out in detail in the school development plan and are reviewed termly to monitor the extent to which milestones are being met. Improvement plans are suitably adapted, following evaluations by leaders and governors. As a result of careful planning and evaluation, leaders have improved the overall quality of teaching and learning. As headteacher, you continue to provide clear direction and strong leadership.

You have utilised funding and reduced the surplus budget to make improvements to the front of the school and several meeting areas. These improvements have enhanced security and provide professional and comfortable spaces for leaders to meet with families and other agencies. Plans are in place to further improve the library and corridors in the forthcoming months.

The development of teaching, learning and assessment has been central to your improvement plans. A well-planned programme of staff training has ensured that teachers and teaching assistants pay closer attention to the work they set for pupils. Work in pupils' books evidences a strong level of challenge in English and mathematics. Teachers check the work of pupils carefully and provide feedback that helps pupils to extend their learning and work at a greater depth. This higher level

of challenge is providing the most able pupils with opportunities to successfully build on what they already know. However, work in subjects across the curriculum, including history and geography, does not always demonstrate the same level of rigour. Senior leaders have identified this in monitoring activities and recognise that further work is required to ensure that expectations and standards are as high as they should be in a wide range of subjects.

Teaching, learning and assessment has improved but there remain some inconsistencies across the school. This is, in part, as a result of the changes to staffing over recent months. Leaders recognise the importance of ensuring that new staff have sufficient time and support to familiarise themselves with your expectations.

Governors and leaders have restructured the school's leadership team and made a number of key appointments. Your assistant headteachers have begun their work with enthusiasm and drive. They have an accurate view of how the school is developing and understand the performance of different groups of pupils. These leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the teachers they line manage. As a result of regular visits to class and teaching alongside their colleagues, leaders are contributing to improvements in teaching.

The actions taken by leaders to strengthen provision in the Nursery and Reception classes are having a positive impact. The outdoor area, for example, has been significantly developed to promote a greater level of independence. During the inspection, children were observed exploring new resources and making choices about what they wanted to learn. Children were also able to accurately recall prior learning. Several children spoke to me about the chicks that had visited them earlier in the term. For instance, they described how the chicks had hatched from their eggs and the different colours of their feathers.

Leaders have invested in a new assessment system that allows them to closely track the achievement of different groups of children. Information from this new assessment system is being used to devise additional support for any pupils that are falling behind. The assessment system is also used by the school's feeder infant school. By using the same system, the schools are able to share information quickly and devise planning that closely meets the needs of pupils. Given how new the assessment system is, it is too early to assess the full impact it is having on standards.

Behaviour in the playground has improved. Break and lunchtimes have been staggered to reduce the number of pupils outside at any given time. The key stage 2 playground has been resurfaced and modernised. Areas of the playground are separated by cones so that it is clear to pupils where different activities are allowed to take place. A group of older pupils act as peer mediators and effectively support other pupils in resolving any difficulties. Although leaders have begun to keep records of the frequency of any incidents or accidents, this information is not yet

sufficiently analysed to allow leaders to act on findings.

Leaders have further developed the programme of guided reading introduced in September 2015. This has included the purchase of new books for all age groups and advisory support from a literacy specialist. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check improved in 2016. Standards in reading at the end of key stage 1 were higher than those found nationally. However, rates of progress and attainment in reading have not been strong at the end of key stage 2. The school's assessment information shows that a higher proportion of children are now on track to reach age-related expectations in reading at the end of key stage 2 in 2017.

Work in pupils' books shows that there is now an increased emphasis on problem-solving skills in mathematics. In line with school policy, pupils are presented with daily challenges that encourage them to use reasoning skills and work at a greater depth. As a result, pupils are making better rates of progress from their starting points.

The governing body has recruited new members to draw upon a wider range of skills and expertise. The chair of the governing body knows the school well, understands its priorities and the work that is required next to ensure that the school is good at its next inspection. Some governors are new to post and do not yet know enough about the school to be able to fully challenge leaders.

External support

The school has forged new relationships with a number of local schools. The local authority has specifically worked with the school to broker a close partnership with a local outstanding provider. Expertise is being shared across the schools and additional staff training has been delivered in priority areas such as reading. As a result of these new partnerships, the quality of teaching is improving.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector