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2 May 2013

Ms Carol Thomas
Headteacher
Eastbury Primary School
Dawson Avenue
Barking
IG11 9QQ

Dear Ms Thomas

Monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Eastbury Primary School, Barking and Dagenham, a school requiring improvement

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2013 with Bradley Simmons HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2012.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, seven members of the governing body, the local authority school improvement officer and the Director Children's services. Telephone calls were made to the Chair of Governors and one other governor. The amended school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documents were scrutinised, including minutes of meetings of the governing body and the shadow interim executive board and local authority reports.

Context

This visit focused specifically on the leadership and management of the school. The interim headteacher remains in post. There are no permanent senior or middle leaders at the school, bar one deputy headteacher who has been on sickness absence since January 2012. Governors, with the help of the local authority, have advertised for the second time for a substantive headteacher, and appointments to three assistant headteacher and four middle leader posts are underway. A shadow

interim executive board, intended, if the Secretary of State gives approval, to replace the governing body, has been formed. The Director of Children's Services has appointed three new governors with specific experience and expertise to strengthen the work of the governing body.

Main findings

At the time of the first monitoring visit, it was expected that an interim executive board would be in place from 1 February 2013. Now, three months later, the governing body is still the responsible authority for the school. In the words of the independent review, commissioned after the school's inspection in September 2012, this governing body has a 'dysfunctional nature'. Its members, although perhaps individually well intentioned, lack a proper understanding of the corporate nature of good governance. Meetings do not focus sufficiently on the impact of the school's actions to improve achievement for all pupils and too much effort is expended on discussing matters that are peripheral to the essential business of the school. Voting records demonstrate a split between a number of parent governors and others. Several governors do not understand that a decision made by a majority vote binds all members, regardless of their personal feelings.

The inability of the governing body to take a corporate and strategic view of the school is underlined by the poor meeting record of its curriculum committee. It has met only once in the past 18 months, and as a result, opportunities to discuss pupils' achievement are minimal. The school's single central record for safeguarding has not been checked by governors. The governing body is not supporting the interim headteacher to improve the school, nor is it meeting all its statutory responsibilities.

Since the last monitoring visit, the school improvement plan has been amended and now contains clear, measurable targets, so that pupils' progress can be checked regularly. As the curriculum committee has not met, the governing body has not reviewed progress in implementing the plan. However, the shadow interim executive board has reviewed it and has asked challenging and pertinent questions of the headteacher. The shadow interim executive board is hampered in its embryonic but promising role because it has no legal powers.

The leadership of teaching is good. The interim headteacher has high standards and is making staff, both teaching and non-teaching, very accountable. Better teaching, together with support from local authority and external consultants is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, staff absence is a major problem which has been allowed to continue for too long. Procedures within the borough to support the school in dealing with staff who are persistently absent are not properly focused on making sure that pupils continuously receive good teaching. This is unacceptable.

External support

The local authority is providing good support for improving teaching. External consultants covering absence in the senior leadership team are providing effective expertise and support for the interim headteacher in the absence of a secure leadership team and effective middle leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Barking and Dagenham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector