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12 March 2012

Mrs P Stoker
Headteacher
Southwick Primary School
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Dear Mrs Stoker

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Southwick Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. I would especially like to thank staff and pupils, the four members of the governing body, including the Chair and vice-chair, and the local authority officer who gave their time at short notice to meet with me.

There have been a number of changes since the last inspection. A deputy headteacher retired in summer 2011 and a new extended-leadership team put in place from September 2011. The leadership team comprises the headteacher, two assistant headteachers and four phase leaders who have responsibility for leading different age groups across the school. Phase leaders also have responsibility for specific subject areas. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in February 2011 and vice-chair in the spring term 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 5 July 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress have improved considerably. This information, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work show that from low starting points pupils are making better progress in lessons. Pupils' progress has accelerated, particularly in Key Stage 1 and Years 3, 4 and 5. Pupils in Year 6 are also making faster progress; however, this has not been rapid enough to tackle fully the history of low standards identified at the time of the inspection. The progress of pupils with a disability or who have special educational needs is improving due to better identification of their needs, carefully targeted support in class and individual interventions where necessary. The rate of progress children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making is impressive. Current

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

assessments show actions are successfully narrowing the gap between their achievements and that found nationally. Pupils' reading, writing and communication skills are improving across the school due to teachers' more-systematic approach in teaching key skills and the wider opportunities pupils now have to read and extend writing through weekly 'Big Write' sessions and in subjects other than English. Writing skills are still lagging behind those of reading but the gap is narrowing. Pupils speak knowledgeably about their targets and how much they help them understand how well they are doing and what they need to do next. They proudly report on how many steps they have made in recent months.

Robust monitoring of teaching by senior and phase leaders, alongside regular whole-school training and individual support to teachers where necessary, is improving its quality. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, tackle the underachievement of previous years and is contributing to pupils' faster progress in lessons. The number of good lessons is increasing and some are outstanding. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good relationships between pupils and teachers are typical of all lessons seen during the visit. In good or better lessons, skilful questioning draws pupils into discussion, giving them time to express ideas and respond with confidence. Leaders' strong focus on teachers' planning is making it more useful. More teachers are using the detailed assessment information they have about pupils' achievements in their plans to match work to their starting points and to interest and engage them. However, there are still some satisfactory lessons where planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' prior learning and where the pace of learning is not fast enough to ensure all pupils make the best progress they can. Leaders are taking action to ensure greater consistency across the school. Leaders are also aware that the good practice in marking seen in some classes is not fully implemented in all, and again, they are taking effective action to tackle this.

Pupils' behaviour was judged to be good at the time of the last inspection and continues to be so. Pupils say they feel safe and value the improvements and change in routine on the yard where zones of different activities help them to play safely on exciting activities and equipment. They feel the addition of extra lunchtime supervisors is adding to their safety. Pupils state that the rare occurrences of bullying are tackled well by any adult with whom they share their concerns. Pupils say they particularly value the wide range of additional activities and visits they can take part in that enrich their experiences and broaden their horizons. They speak enthusiastically about how teachers are making lessons 'more fun' and this is helping them to enjoy school and attend more regularly. Leaders have taken strident actions to improve attendance and rates have moved from well-below average in summer 2011 to average by February 2012. Parents and carers are taking much more responsibility for their children's attendance due to the focus leaders have placed on it. Pupils are enthused by the celebration of their improving attendance and the huge increase in the number of 'praise cards' sent home to their parents and carers celebrating the achievement of their attendance targets.

Senior leaders are tackling the areas for improvement with tenacity. They are well supported by phase leaders who are relishing their developing leadership roles. Phase leaders are now contributing to whole-school evaluation and the school's improvement priorities as well as to

improvements in their areas of responsibility. The collective impact of senior and phase leaders' work is evident in improvements in the quality of teaching, planning, marking, use of data and the faster progress pupils are making in lessons. All staff are motivated and energised by the changes taking place, they are tackling improvements positively and morale is high. However, some improvements are not embedded across the school which is why progress is judged satisfactory overall.

Following the school being given a notice to improve, the local authority submitted a statement of action to Ofsted and this was judged to be fit for purpose. Local authority officers have made a valuable contribution to the improvements already seen. Together with a peer headteacher from a local school, they have been especially valuable in supporting leadership, management, teaching and learning. The impact of developing the role of phase leaders has been particularly helpful in building further capacity in the school in maintaining its own improvement; consequently, the involvement of external partners is reducing effectively as school leaders retake the reins more fully.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2011

- Raise attainment by improving the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use accurate assessments to plan appropriately challenging tasks to further accelerate the pace of learning
 - further raising the expectations of staff around what pupils can achieve
 - developing the use of targets with pupils to ensure that they are all aware of their progress and the next steps to improve their work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - further developing the role of all leaders in monitoring pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching
 - accelerating the pace of improvement even faster.
- Improve attendance to at least in line with the national average by the end of the academic year in 2012.