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8 February 2013

Mrs S Masters
Headteacher
Fernhill Primary School
Neville Duke Road
Farnborough
GU14 9BY

Dear Mrs Masters

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Fernhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 February 2013, 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 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 December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and consultant headteacher, teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a governor and the local authority district manager. The school improvement and development plan was evaluated and the inspector looked at other documents used by leaders to evaluate and monitor the schools work.

Context

Significant changes have occurred since the inspection:

- a new acting headteacher was appointed for January 2013; the previous acting headteacher is taking a consultative role
- governors have started the process for the appointment of a permanent headteacher
- links with consultant headteacher host school have been strengthened for staff training, coaching and mentoring opportunities

- one teacher is currently on maternity leave and another left the school at Christmas
- two more teachers will be leaving at the February half term
- the headteacher has employed temporary teachers until the end of the current academic year to ensure continuity of learning for pupils.

Main findings

Senior leaders, governors and local authority officers have started the process to secure the permanent headship of the school. The acting headteacher has been appointed to the end of the current academic year to secure stability for pupils, staff and parents. She has quickly gained the confidence of staff. A previous acting headteacher is working with the school for two days each week to provide continuity and to support the improvements started before the inspection. Senior leaders, including governors, have tackled underperformance robustly, although the school remains in a fragile position whilst there is no permanent headteacher and it is employing a number of temporary staff.

The acting headteachers have set a clear path of improvement, within realistic timescales, which is already having a positive impact on raising staff morale. Teachers say they now know what the school is aiming to achieve and are excited by the prospect. The school improvement plan is focused firmly on tackling the areas for improvement identified at the inspection and other priorities for developing the school's work in the long-term. It has measurable milestones to help monitor improvements. However, the start times for actions are not identified specifically to ensure staff know when these will occur and how they will be monitored.

Staff training has a high profile and is starting to impact positively on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have benefitted from working with senior leaders and staff in the link school and are developing their leadership skills. They say senior leaders are enabling them to take a fuller part in developing the school's work.

The governing body's action plan has helped increase governors' confidence to monitor, challenge and support the school's work. Governors' have worked closely with local authority officers to audit and improve their roles. As result, the governing body is being reviewed and will be re-constituted by April 2013. There is a clear understanding about the importance of securing the leadership of the school as early as possible.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- secure the headship of the school, utilising the support and advice of local authority officers. Inform HMI of the outcomes of the headteacher appointment process
- ensure start times for actions are included in the action plan to support developments and to ensure staff know when these will occur and how they will be monitored
- complete and send summaries of the pupil progress assessments currently being completed to HMI
- attend seminars being run by Ofsted for schools requiring improvement to become good or better.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school on a regular basis until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided a broad range of effective support during the recent turbulence in leadership and staffing. The district manager, learning partner and consultants have provided useful training and support for school leaders and the governing body, which is helping to bring about positive developments in English, mathematics and the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have brokered acting headships and are working closely with the governing body to secure the permanent leadership of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector