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Mrs Vicky Helliwell
Headteacher
Swinton Fitzwilliam Primary School
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Dear Mrs Helliwell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Swinton Fitzwilliam Primary School, Rotherham

Following my visit to your school on 1 July 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, seven members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

A teacher left the school in April and was replaced by a temporary teacher. Following a staff re-structure, three new teaching posts have been created. Teachers have been appointed to start in September to fill three new posts and three vacancies. New co-ordinators have been appointed for the Early Years Foundation Stage and for new technology. The responsibility for special educational needs has been re-allocated.

Main findings

School data shows that pupils made better progress over the last year in most year groups. Progress was slower in Year 4 due to weaker teaching which has recently improved. Provisional Year 6 results suggest that although progress has improved this year attainment remains at a similar level as last year. At Key Stage 1, attainment is lower than last year due to differences in the cohort of pupils. Provisional Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes show that more pupils met the early learning goals in calculation, shape, space and measure. Outcomes in writing are also better but they are lower in reading.

The school has continued to develop its strategies for matching teaching to the needs of different groups and to engage pupils more successfully in their learning. The school's recent evaluation shows improvement in handwriting and presentation which has been supported by competitions and rewards. Leaders report that pupils are more motivated because they have more choice of what to write about. Pupils, including boys, have begun to write at greater length. Writing on different types of paper and making greater use of new technology are improving pupils' sense of audience and the quality of presentation.

Marking has been refined with a sharper focus on pupils' response. Comments are becoming more specific about what pupils need to do to improve and pupils now have 'fix it' time to give a response. Teachers have started to consult pupils about what interests them in order to increase their engagement. This has influenced the choice of next year's topics. The 'Achievement for All' project has improved the target setting and provision for pupils with special needs and others who are underachieving and parents are more engaged in supporting their children's learning.

The headteacher provides strong and energetic leadership. Plans address the key inspection issues and actions have begun to be implemented and evaluated. Bold changes are in place for September with a move from mixed-age classes to smaller single-age groups, using more teachers and fewer teaching assistants. Rooms are being re-designed and re-allocated. Improvements have been made to the outdoor area of the Early Years Foundation Stage. More resources are outside and activities are better focussed on particular skills, especially in mathematics. Further improvements to the outdoor learning environment are about to be implemented for the early years and Year 1.

Effective action has been taken to eradicate inadequate teaching. Lesson observation and feedback have been tailored more closely to the needs of individual teachers. This is supported by increased opportunities to observe good practice in other schools. Middle leaders are also developing their expertise through these visits. Middle and senior leaders are increasingly encouraged to carry out their own research and develop their own plans for improvement. This has generated increased enthusiasm and shared commitment to change.

Governors have developed a more focussed approach to school visits that is giving them a stronger grasp of teaching and learning. Training has helped them to improve procedures and compare themselves with other governing bodies. They have been fully involved in the discussion of school changes and provide informed support. The headteacher's clear reports of actions and impact, and of data analysis, are enabling governors to ask deeper questions about teaching and learning. They are keen to develop their methods and questioning for challenging school performance.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching to ensure that, by July 2014, the school can demonstrate good progress and improved attainment at all key stages.

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

External support

Leaders are improving teaching by making links with schools that have a specific expertise that matches a school need. A wide range of staff have benefited from training and development with other schools. The local authority has helped to broker support within and beyond the local authority. The school contributes to and benefits from links with other schools in the local learning community. The local authority usefully provides regular support and challenge for the headteacher.

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

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell

Her Majesty's Inspector