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25 October 2013

Mrs S Hatt
Headteacher
Fir Ends Primary School
Smithfield
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Carlisle
Cumbria
CA6 6AY

Dear Mrs Hatt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fir Ends Primary School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 24 October 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 July. 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. The school should take further action to:

- ensure staff apply the marking policy consistently
- develop the role of subject leaders to ensure they have more impact on improvement
- tighten up the action plan to make sure the staff responsible report to governors every half term on the improvements to pupils' progress.

Evidence

I met with you, the leader of special educational needs and assessment, the literacy co-ordinator, six pupils from Key Stage 2, five members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also evaluated the tracking of pupils' progress system, governing body minutes, lesson observation documents and your report to the governing body on the most recent KS1 and KS2 results.

Context

Since the last inspection one teacher has moved to another school and one teacher is on maternity leave. These two teachers have been replaced by newly qualified teachers. You are also employing an extra teaching assistant to work part time.

Main findings

You, your staff and the governing body are committed to moving the school forward. You have devolved some management responsibilities and teachers are keen to support your leadership of the school. However, the management structure and the role of subject leaders need to be made clearer to ensure accountability for the impact on improvement is maintained.

Standardised baseline tests are now being used to set more accurate targets for pupils. Careful tracking of pupil progress is enabling appropriate interventions to be put in place for pupils who need extra support. The results for mathematics in Key Stage 2 show a significant improvement on last year. Your improved tracking system enables you to demonstrate the impact of the interventions used to improve the progress of pupils. Numeracy targets are more challenging and pupils are more aware of what is expected of them. A mathematics consultant has delivered training to the staff on how to make mathematics more exciting for pupils. As a result Year 5 and Year 6 pupils enjoyed a recent maths lesson based on a murder mystery.

Staff meetings are more focused on improving teaching and pupil progress meetings are planned to be half-termly. The staff team is stronger: your new staff are keen to increase their skills, and staff are sharing information and feel less isolated through increased communication. You are starting to use the local cluster of schools more effectively to help your teachers share good practice and ensure consistency in judgements of pupils' levels of attainment. Your links with other schools need to be developed further so that teachers can see examples of outstanding teaching.

Pupils were keen to show me their work and explain the new marking system. They said that they did not always have time to correct their work and that sometimes the teacher made the corrections for them. This is an area that needs to be addressed to ensure greater consistency amongst teachers and make sure pupils have the time to learn by correcting their own mistakes. Pupils also said they are being encouraged to work more independently in school and this is increasing their confidence. They talked confidently about the new reading system and how their reading skills are developing.

Joint lesson observations, with your local authority advisor, have taken place and you have a realistic view of the teaching in the school. As a result targeted support is now in place and the school is clear about the areas which require improvement. Teachers are being proactive and have set up links with colleagues in other schools: consequently the literacy co-ordinator has consulted all staff on the literacy policy and is developing a more confident lead on literacy across the school.

The governing body are fully behind the school staff and have reviewed the level of challenge and support they offer the school. They are aware that teaching needs to improve to promote the highest quality provision for all pupils and are not complacent about their role in driving forward improvement to raise standards.

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

The local authority representative has given positive support to the school by sharpening your focus. He has undertaken joint lesson observations with you and helped formulate the school action plan. However, the plan needs to include specific dates and methods of how to measure the impact of the actions on the outcomes for children. Your advisor has linked you with a local leader in education and has confidence that you will improve the school. The links you and your staff forge with other schools will increase the level of confidence, shared responsibility and teamwork that you are keen to foster.

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

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority