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Mrs B Davison
Headteacher
Fairway Infant School, Copthorne
The Fairway
Copthorne
Crawley
West Sussex
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Dear Mrs Davison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fairway Infant School, Copthorne

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 October 2013. 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:

- improve further the way in which teachers offer feedback to pupils and ensuring pupils improve their work in response to such feedback, including marking
- link governors' visits to the school explicitly to monitoring key objectives and targets within the school improvement plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, members of staff and representatives of the Governing Body and the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I looked at key documents. We visited together all classes while working, toured the school and looked at some samples of pupils' work.

Main findings

The school's overall effectiveness grade dropped from outstanding to requires improvement at the inspection. While there was disappointment within the school community, this outcome was not unexpected for you. You know teaching needs to improve; the inspection report gives you more leverage to make needed change. Pleasingly, since the inspection, already much has been done. The strong management systems you had already arranged, such as those for checking how well pupils are progressing and for managing the performance of staff, make this easier. The school improvement plan is clearly structured. Parents are supportive.

Teaching needs to become consistently at least good. To help this, we agreed that the school should focus on ensuring that pupils receive very good individual, group and whole class verbal and written feedback on how well they are doing. There needs to be a clear expectation that pupils will respond immediately to this and improve their work swiftly. We saw together examples of very thorough marking where pupils had nevertheless not appeared to act on the comments.

We looked at pupils' writing from Year 2. Overall, its quality was about what should be expected at this stage. Pupils' used grammar appropriately and their work was interesting to the reader. Pupils generally form their letters accurately but few use cursive (joined up) script yet. It is good to hear that plans are afoot to deal with this.

The well-organised school data on pupil's progress shows that pupils are generally making at least reasonable progress. There is very little underachievement and different groups of pupils, including the small number who are entitled to pupil premium funding, do about as well as each other. There was a significant improvement in pupils' scores in phonics (linking letters and sounds) in 2013. Rightly, you point out that the rate of pupils' progress across English and mathematics needs to increase further to be good. You have worked hard to improve the accuracy of the school's data about pupils' progress and ensure that it is well known to all teachers. This has involved useful work with your linked junior school and other schools. It was good to hear of such local partnerships flourishing.

When we toured the school, pupils' behaviour appeared very good, as it was at the inspection. Pupils were ready to learn, concentrated well and joined in effectively in group tasks. They were friendly and polite, showing concern for each other's needs.

It was good to hear of the breadth in the curriculum. For instance, we saw some interesting-looking practical art lessons, based on Van Gogh's work. The school has a vibrant and interesting learning environment, with well-organised resources and attractive displays. We discussed the school's lovely grounds and the potential for significant outdoor learning all year round. All this shows there is ample scope for pupils to learn more quickly, when teaching is consistently good.

The deputy headteacher joined the school in the autumn and, in a staged way, you and she are rightly working together to develop her role. We discussed, for example, her important work in exemplifying good teaching and how this could develop into a more formal coaching and training role amongst staff. The school's middle leadership system is sensibly arranged.

The improving Governing Body is keenly led by its Chair and Vice Chair. It was good to hear of the wide range of expertise amongst governors and some valuable recent appointments. This, and useful training, is helping the governing body to understand better the useful information they receive from you and to become more challenging. Governors are helpfully attached to classes and subjects. The local authority has recently recommended that governors should also specifically monitor aspects of the school improvement plan and I fully agree. The review of the work of the governing body, recommended in the inspection, is about to happen and I look forward to receiving the report and any recommendations from this. It was good to hear of the willingness of the governing body to act on the outcomes of this review.

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's support to the school before the inspection was limited but, since the inspection, it has improved notably. A new key adviser is now attached to the school whose advice is apt and very clear. She has agreed with me that she will visit the school about every six weeks to review the school's progress formally. You consented to provide notes of these meetings to me. In addition, other local authority consultants are providing useful advice and support and we agreed this should continue as needed, under your management.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector