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Mr Peter Howard
Headteacher
Fairisle Junior School
Fairisle Road
Lordshill
Southampton
SO16 8BY

Dear Mr Howard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fairisle Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 14 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:

- make sure leaders focus sharply on evaluating pupils' learning when observing lessons, including the learning of different groups and make better use of Ofsted's published guidance on evaluating teaching
- specify, in the school improvement plan, how leaders' skills in monitoring teaching will be strengthened so that teachers receive detailed, helpful feedback
- identify, in conjunction with the local authority, one or more schools that can offer good support on assessment, to assure leaders and teachers that pupils' attainment is being judged accurately by all.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We made brief visits to classrooms to observe pupils at work. The school's plan for improvement was evaluated along with a sample of the forms you and other leaders use for your own lesson observations. Records of your meetings with teachers, to review pupils' progress, were scrutinised.

Context

At the time of the section 5 inspection, you were the executive headteacher of another school. This temporary arrangement no longer applies. Three teachers have joined the school since the section 5 inspection.

Main findings

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have, rightly, concentrated on improving teaching and raising teachers' expectations of the progress that pupils should make. They draw on an appropriate range of evidence, including interviews with pupils and scrutiny of their work, to gain a rounded view of the quality of teaching in each class. Senior leaders have looked at pupils' learning in this way for some time but their approach has tightened up considerably since the inspection.

There have been quite a few changes in teaching staff over recent months. Leaders have a good grasp of the current quality of teaching and know where any relative weaknesses lie. A coaching programme is in place to move weaker teaching to good, for example, and good teaching to outstanding. It will be important to evaluate the impact of this programme to make sure that it is sharply tailored and of clear benefit to each member of staff in guiding their development.

Senior leaders are drawing upon outside support. They have taken on board some ideas from visiting other schools and from attending Ofsted's Getting to Good seminar. For example, they have increased the frequency of checks on pupils' progress. These now occur every half term so that leaders can keep more closely in touch with how well pupils' progress is picking up. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have benefited from leadership training, through the Portwood Teaching Alliance. Wisely, they have used this opportunity to focus on marking, which the section 5 inspection found needed some improvement.

Leaders have taken appropriate action since the inspection and there is no sense of the school standing still. However, there are some important aspects that are not yet in place that could hold the school back if they are not tackled.

When observing lessons, senior leaders use a tick-list approach and largely base their judgements on how many features fall into the 'good' or 'requiring

improvement' column. They do not evaluate how well the different groups of pupils are learning at various stages of the lesson, such as the more able pupils or those with special educational needs. The rather formulaic approach is limiting the quality and preciseness of leaders' feedback to teachers, so that teachers know what could have been improved. The school improvement plan does not show how leaders' skills in evaluating lessons and identifying helpful, detailed feedback will be developed. This is a key omission.

Very challenging targets have been set for reading, writing and mathematics, to promote good achievement. While it is important to have high aspirations, the targets are too ambitious. The data from December 2013 show that pupils' attainment is already falling short of the interim targets for the end of the autumn term, in almost all cases. To ensure the targets are challenging but realistic, leaders need to be assured that all teachers are making accurate judgements, when assessing pupils' attainment, and to provide training and coaching where needed.

The Chair of Governors has received helpful support from the local authority to resolve the problem of vacancies on the governing body. Plans to reconstitute the governing body and carry out an audit of governors' skills and experience are well under way. The Chair of Governors has approached the School Governors' One Stop Shop to fill remaining vacancies.

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 school's leaders and governors have benefited from support from the local authority, in drawing up the school's improvement plan and improving governance. The plan covers the areas that need to be improved but needs strengthening further for some aspects of leadership, as outlined earlier in this letter. It is rather wordy and would benefit from sharpening further, to make sure that key priorities and actions are clearly to the fore. The local authority's support for governance has been well targeted and useful.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector