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Tuesday 21 January 2014

Vania Williams
St Mary's Farnham Royal CofE Primary School
Church Road
Farnham Royal
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Dear Miss Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Farnham Royal CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 21 January, 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- review the school improvement plan so that:
 - the impact of planned actions to improve teaching and pupils' achievements are made explicitly clear
 - a clear timeline and termly milestones are provided so the success of the plan can be monitored
 - external evaluations are included in the plan
 - the monitoring of teaching places a greater emphasis on the progress pupils are making
- agree a tapered programme of support with the local authority to improve the effectiveness of the school
- members of the governing body to undertake training on how to interrogate data and gather more first-hand evidence of the work of the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, 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 and self-evaluation form were evaluated along with minutes of governing body meetings and notes of visits from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust officers. I conducted a learning walk visiting all classes and spoke with some Year 4 pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection in October 2013, 2 teachers have left the school, one new governor has been appointed, 4 teaching assistants have joined the school and a new deputy headteacher took up post in January 2014. Two teaching posts remain unfilled and are currently covered by long term supply teachers. One member of staff has taken up a new post within the school to lead on the development of early reading.

Main findings

The headteacher is working tirelessly for the pupils and wider community at the school to bring about the changes necessary. Staff absence and a lack of personnel in key roles have hampered better progress being made since the inspection. The appointment of a deputy headteacher to the leadership team in January strengthens the senior leadership team.

Recent training for teachers on improving their questioning skills, in the teaching of early reading, spelling punctuation and grammar is yet to be checked to measure its impact. An exercise held in January to establish revised classroom expectations and the future strategic direction for the school was attended by only one governor and is not yet embedded. The school improvements plan introduced following the inspection focuses too much on actions and not what difference they will make to teaching and pupils' achievements. This lack of clarity over the impact of actions is also evident in the reporting of monitoring activities. Too much emphasis is placed on what teachers are doing and not the impact of their actions. Consequently there is a lack of understanding, most notably by governors, but also by some leaders and teachers over what is expected of them and the rate of urgency at which they are expected to improve.

Governors are not fully aware of their role in driving improvements. As one governor said 'there needs to be a step change in culture and we're still learning'. First hand evidence gathering is infrequent and does not yet tie in with the school improvement plan priorities or timelines. Governors are over-reliant on information provided by the

school and are not yet displaying a clear understanding of the expectation and urgency needed to become good. Governors recognise that training on how to interrogate data more precisely and the use of external evaluations would enable them to contribute more strongly to school developments.

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

Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has provided copious and on-going support for the school. Useful assistance for the headteacher enhanced the school's leadership capacity whilst the school lacked a deputy headteacher last year. Visit notes are accurate, provide helpful information and reflect the school's strengths and areas for development. However, the school has become too reliant on this external support. Some leaders and teachers are failing to take full responsibility for improving their own performance. HMI met with a representative of the local authority during the inspection to press home the need for a tapered programme of support to improve the effectiveness of the school's monitoring by providing modelling, coaching and training for leaders at all levels and in order for the school to become sustainably autonomous.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light

Her Majesty's Inspector