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6 March 2014

Mrs Bernie Greenwood  
Acting headteacher  
Great Smeaton Academy Primary School  
Great Smeaton  
Northallerton  
North Yorkshire  
DL6 2EQ

Dear Mrs Greenwood

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Great Smeaton Academy Primary School, North Yorkshire**

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2014, 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 November 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:

- secure the long-term leadership of the school so that staffing is stabilised
- clarify for both teachers and the governing body what 'exceeding expected levels of progress' looks like for each cohort of pupils so that teachers' expectations of what is to be achieved from term-to-term and by the end of the year is clearly understood
- ensure that the external review of governance is commissioned quickly now that stability has been brought to the governing body.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the headteacher commissioned to provide support and two members of the governing body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I undertook a brief tour of the school, speaking informally to pupils in each class, and evaluated a range of documentation including the school action plan, pupil progress information and the recent records of the checks made of teaching.

## **Context**

The acting headteacher continues to lead the school in the absence of the substantive headteacher. A long-term supply teacher is covering a class previously taught by an assistant headteacher who has left the school since the section 5 inspection. There have been five new appointments to the governing body since November.

## **Main findings**

This is a school undergoing a significant period of transition. The astute and decisive action of the Chair of the Governing Body, both before and since the November inspection, has rapidly secured your leadership of the school in the short-term. However, there remains much instability within the school as other senior leaders have left and classes are being covered by long-term supply teachers. Governors have rightly acknowledged that the staffing structure of the school needs to be urgently reviewed, especially given the small number of classes. This needs to begin with the quick resolution of leadership issues so that staffing can stabilise and the effective work already undertaken can be sustained.

While you were well aware of the weaknesses in the school prior to the inspection, and were working quickly to address them, the judgment that the school requires improvement came as a shock to the staff. Nevertheless, you have worked swiftly to win their 'hearts and minds' so that there is an acceptance of what needs to be done and a common drive for improvement. The systems and processes you implemented before the inspection to improve the leadership of teaching have now had time to embed into daily routine so that there are clear lines of accountability, linking the quality of teaching to the progress you expect pupils to make.

The regular, partnership working with an outstanding school, in particular, has raised staff awareness of exactly what they each need to contribute to make the school good or better in the next 18-24 months. Improvements to the analysis of pupil progress information has revealed that many of the pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 have already made the progress expected of them, sometimes two years ahead of nationally expected rates. However, more needs to be done to raise teachers' expectations about how far pupils can still progress in their learning, especially as most pupils show the aptitude and ability to reach the very highest standards in their work. Clarifying with greater precision what you mean by 'exceeding expected rates of progress' will ensure that there is no doubt, from teachers or governors, about what you expect teachers to achieve with their pupils from term-to-term and by the end of the year.

Governors are passionate about improving the life-chances of pupils through a better quality of teaching and more rapid progress. There is clear ambition to move the school forward at pace to secure a judgement of good on the longer pathway to becoming outstanding overall; a shared ambition amongst governors and those supporting the school. Considerable expertise exists within the governing body and this has supported with finance, human resources and the health and safety of the site over recent weeks. While the Chair of the Governing Body has held back from commissioning the external review of governance, as there have been numerous changes to the composition of members, now that it has stabilised, it is timely to ensure that this happens quickly so that there is further insight into how governors – the constant element of leadership in the coming months – can better challenge leaders about exactly how far the school has yet to go.

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**

A considerable package of support has been commissioned from St George's Church of England Academy by the Chair of the Governing Body, an outstanding school within a partnership of academies in Darlington. You work in tandem with the headteacher of this school to plan highly relevant training and coaching opportunities, including the opportunity for staff to pair with a colleague from St George's Academy to observe best practice and share effective strategies to hasten pupil progress. These have been undertaken to good effect. They have begun to raise everyone's expectations about the quality of teaching that is needed to secure the very best from pupils. This is already leading to improvements in teaching. All are agreed that this working partnership should continue while leadership and staffing issues are being resolved.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and as below.

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit - for academies