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3 April 2014

Mrs Alison Cairns
Headteacher
North Fawdon Primary School
Brotherlee Road
Fawdon
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE3 2SL

Dear Mrs Cairns

Special Measures monitoring inspection of North Fawdon Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, and with the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Newcastle North West Learning Trust. I also met with representatives from the local authority and with three parents of children at the school. Together, we also toured the school, visiting every classroom while lessons were taking place. I also checked the school's single central record for accuracy and completeness.

Context

Since the inspection in December 2013, a newly-qualified teacher has resigned and one of the deputy headteachers now teaches the Year 2 class. An additional non-teaching deputy headteacher has been appointed, initially on a fixed-term contract until December 2015. In addition, the school has appointed a family support leader, a part-time teacher to support small-group intervention in Year 6, a teaching assistant in Year 5 and a part-time sports coach. The Year 4 teacher is currently on maternity leave, and this class is being taught by a newly-qualified teacher. The teacher in Year 3 will be leaving the school at the end of this week and it is expected that an experienced teacher from a nearby school will be seconded to teach this class after Easter. Three new governors have been appointed from the Newcastle North West Learning Trust, of which the school is a member.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and governors have taken positive action in response to the findings of the inspection, although the school improvement plan in its current form will not support the school well in accelerating further improvement. Despite the disappointment that followed the decision to place the school in special measures, there is a clear and widely held determination to tackle the weaknesses indicated in the inspection report. The urgency with which staff and governors, supported by external partners, have begun to address the issues raised is testament to this resolve.

Improvements to governance exemplify this well. Responding to the findings of an external review, little time has been wasted in strengthening the governing body. Rapidly reconstituted following the inspection, it now has a wealth of experience and expertise, including from education and from business, enhanced by the work of the trust. Governors are now providing a much higher level of challenge and scrutiny to school leaders, and understand well the need for the school to show rapid improvement. In addition, the link with a National Leader of Governance and a recent visit to see the governing body at an outstanding school in action, have helped governors to understand more clearly the role and impact of a highly effective governing body.

The school's leadership capacity has been similarly strengthened. The appointment of an experienced, non-teaching, deputy headteacher, funded directly by the local authority, has provided valuable support for important initiatives. You have rightly focussed on increasing the scope, frequency and quality of checks on teaching. This is helping to establish a secure baseline for improvement and to evaluate the early signs of impact of actions taken to improve teaching, such as the establishment of a series of 'non-negotiable' elements to teachers' marking and planning. You have also rightly prioritised a series of actions where a number of 'quick wins' can be secured. For example, you have greatly raised the profile of improved attendance, including through a series of rewards and text messages to parents. As a result, current levels of attendance, which are close to the national average for primary schools, are now higher than at the time of the inspection.

Following the outcome of the inspection, the local authority and partner schools in the trust moved rapidly to support school leaders. Much of this support is spelled out clearly in the local authority's statement of action. For example, the headteacher of Wyndham Primary School, who is a Local Leader of Education, is providing useful support as a mentor. Staff from your school and from other schools in the trust have already begun to collaborate to strengthen assessment and moderation.

However, in its current form, the school improvement plan is not fit for purpose. Although the plan does address the areas for improvement identified at the inspection, and detail a range of appropriate actions in response, it is not a good enough tool to support school leaders and governors to bring about more rapid improvement. The plan should, instead, specify a clearly defined 'end-point', a series of appropriate interim 'milestones' and delineate clearly which personnel are responsible for leading, implementing, checking and evaluating each aspect of the plan. The role of the governing body, and the input of other partners, should also be clearly specified for each aspect of the plan. I will check on the appropriateness and impact of your revised plan during my next visit to the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose, but will need further refinement in order to ensure close alignment with revisions to the school's improvement plan.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Newcastle Upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Lee Northern

Her Majesty's Inspector