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2 May 2014

Emma Clarke
Headteacher
Farley Hill Primary School
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Berkshire
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Dear Mrs Clarke

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Farley Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 February 2014. 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:

- strengthen governance by observing the work of a high performing governing body belonging to a similar school
- deploy the relevant expertise that governors bring to the role more effectively so as to improve the work of the governing body.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and your senior leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the action plan and

during the morning teaching session we visited most of the classrooms in the school. At lunchtime I ate with lunch with you and your pupils in the school's canteen.

Context

The Year 5 class teacher has left the school since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and your leaders are steering the school in the right direction through the changes you have made so far. You are determined to move the school forward at a pace. You are making adjustments in the areas identified in the last inspection in a resolute and determined manner.

The school's action plan clearly focuses on the areas for improvement from the last inspection. The plan provides appropriately sequenced detail about what you aim to do. However it does not consistently identify how these actions will make a difference to pupils. It rightly gives governors some responsibility for checking whether actions being taken are effective. Some governors are doing this well. Other governors are not making these checks with enough rigour. Following the thorough monitoring you have recently carried out, you have updated the plan. This update provides a useful steer for you to direct improvements in the future.

You have carefully considered how best to present information about pupils' progress towards their targets. The visual manner in which you present this information ('visual maps') is making it easier for leaders and teachers to check whether the work planned meets the needs of all pupils. On the occasions when it does not, leaders are working closely with teachers to make the appropriate changes. However, they are not consistently checking that these changes are being carried out. Although they provide useful information about overall levels of achievement, the 'visual maps' do not give a clear picture of how well different groups of pupils are doing.

You have established a useful set of strategies to improve the progress pupils make in lessons. You have worked tirelessly with the school's leaders and teachers to ensure these strategies are applied in lessons as reliably as possible. This consistency extends to teaching assistants. You are acutely aware of the need to continue your relentless monitoring of consistency and rapidly train new staff in your expectations. The positive effects of these strategies is beginning to be seen in the quality of pupils' writing and the articulate way in which your pupils express themselves when talking to adults. Teachers are consistently setting learning objectives that include the steps pupils need in order to be successful. They are rightly setting harder learning objectives for the more able pupils. Despite this there is still not sufficient challenge in all classes for this group of pupils. In such cases

neither the tasks themselves, nor the structured way in which you require them to be completed, provide enough scope for more able pupils.

The Chair and Vice Chair of Governors are committed to making the changes necessary to move the school rapidly to good. They understand that they have a crucial role in holding the school to account and are actively sharing that understanding with other governors. Some of the governors currently lack the know-how and confidence needed to ask the challenging questions required. Other governors have relevant skills that are currently not being used enough. However the Chair and Vice Chair are determined to change this situation quickly. The recommendations in the review of governance are not detailed enough to help the governance of the school to improve. Plans are in place for an independent consultant to provide further support.

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 involvement with the school so far has been limited. They have focused on helping you to write the action plan, assisting with personnel issues and commissioning the review of governance. To boost the level of external assistance, you have wisely used your local knowledge to harness support from local primary and secondary schools. Plans to provide further support are only now starting to be implemented. It is therefore important that the local authority keeps a tight check on the progress of these plans and ensures actions are undertaken promptly. During my visit we agreed that the local authority will also support you in training teachers to provide sufficient challenge for the more able pupils. The local authority rightly now acknowledges that they have a crucial role to play in brokering the specific support requested by governors and monitoring whether it is leading to the speedy improvements needed.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector