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8 July 2014

Mrs J Squibb
Interim Executive Headteacher
Siskin Infant and Nursery School
Nimrod Drive
Rowner
Gosport
PO13 8AA

Dear Mrs Squibb

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Siskin Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 8 July 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 April 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:

- make sure teachers' marking and feedback is always concise, relevant and helpful, so pupils know what their next steps are and can act upon the advice
- ensure that leaders' roles and responsibilities are all clearly defined and that they know what they are accountable for
- ensure communication between governors and senior leaders is consistently effective and helps governors to know what progress is being made.

Evidence

During the visit I met with the senior leadership team, the vice-chair of the governing body and middle leaders. I visited classrooms with senior leaders and talked to a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also looked at pupils' work in books and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

A teacher, who is a specialist leader of education (a programme for experienced teachers run by the Department for Education), has returned from maternity leave. This has enabled the deputy headteacher to be released from full-time class teaching so she can carry out her leadership duties.

Main findings

You have effectively focused your attention on the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection in April 2014. You know what needs to be done to progress further.

The school has continued to improve the teaching and learning of writing. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, letters and sounds (phonics) are now taught every day and teachers in all year groups have reviewed how they are teaching phonics. It is good to see the youngest children are encouraged to write more often. Teachers are leading more activities that link to writing skills, such as mark-making and drawing patterns on large paper. In Years 1 and 2, the frequency and amount of writing has increased. Although pupils are not yet working at the expected levels for their age, their progress is accelerating.

Presentation and handwriting have improved. As pupils move through the school teachers' expectations of presentation are now appropriate to the age of pupils. Handwriting is being taught explicitly and there is evidence that where this is happening regularly, good progress is being made.

Middle leaders talk passionately about what they are doing to improve their areas of responsibility, such as the changes to writing and phonics, but they are not all able to explain the how those actions will help pupils to make more progress. This will be a priority for senior leaders next term, so that all leaders are accountable for the progress of pupils.

Teachers are now using information about what pupils can already do to identify next steps more accurately. Marking is thorough but is still not routinely helping pupils to know what they need to learn next, and what they can do about it.

Governors demonstrate that they know the school well. They have rightly concentrated on trying to secure a permanent headteacher but have been unable to do so. Governors recognise that they now need to focus more sharply on the areas for improvement so that they know what improvements are being made and rigorously hold senior leaders to account. The formal communication between the governors and senior leaders is usually effective but there have been unhelpful delays in sharing information between meetings.

The current arrangements for senior leadership have been effective in enabling the school to make progress but the forthcoming changes of leadership have led to some uncertainty. Governors and the local authority have identified that senior leadership needs to be strengthened and have made appropriate plans for next term. This is crucial for the school to continue to progress.

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 recognises the specific needs of the school and has provided useful support for leaders at all levels. The leadership learning partner has supported and developed senior leaders directly and plans to continue this during the leadership changes. Middle leadership training and support have enabled subject and phase leaders to begin to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility, but there is more to do. The local authority is providing the right support for governors during the recruitment of a headteacher, and during the interim leadership period.

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

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams

Seconded Inspector