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20 November 2014

Mrs Helen Simpson
Headteacher
Ferham Primary School
Ferham Road
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S61 1AP

Dear Mrs Simpson

Requires improvement: Third monitoring visit to Ferham Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 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.

A monitoring inspection visit took place in November 2013, following the section 5 inspection in July 2013 which judged the school to require improvement. A second visit to assist in the school's improvement took place in March 2014. A letter was sent to the school but was not published.

This third visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The visit was prompted by concerns about low achievement in national tests in 2014.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to bring about improvements identified at the last section 5 inspection.

Evidence

I met with you, the temporary associate leader, middle leaders, the new Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and a local authority representative. I also scrutinised school and local authority evaluation reports and the school improvement plan.

Context

The deputy headteacher has been absent since January 2014. The Key Stage 2 leader left for promotion in the summer 2014. The headteacher temporarily taught a class in September until a temporary associate leader took up post at the end of September.

Pupil mobility remains exceptionally high. During the course of the last school year, 57 pupils arrived (the equivalent of two out of the seven classes) and 36 left (the

equivalent of another class). By the end of the school year, only half of the pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 had been at the school from the beginning of Year 3. So far, 32 pupils have either left or arrived at the school since the beginning of the autumn term. Slovak pupils are now the largest ethnic group, making up a third of the population, higher than the Pakistani population.

Leadership and management

Your clear and detailed evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses in achievement promotes actions that are accurately targeted at weaknesses in teaching and learning. Professional development has had a positive impact in improving the achievement of non-mobile pupils, especially in mathematics. Leaders report that improvements in teaching, especially in mathematics, have improved pupils' learning. In some cases, teaching has not become sufficiently skilful to consistently respond well to the exceptionally wide range of needs. These include the high proportion of pupils who are new arrivals, with little English, and who have been admitted at other than the normal starting points.

The continued absence of the deputy headteacher has limited the capacity of leadership. It has affected the pace of improvement and placed an additional burden on you. The local authority brokered the temporary secondment of an associate leader which has recently strengthened short-term capacity. In addition, next term, a local leader of education from an outstanding school Sheffield, Brightside Nursery and Infants School, which serves a similar school population, will support developments in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Middle leaders have provided more effective leadership in mathematics and they have worked well with local authority consultants to improve teaching and learning. Literacy leaders are newer to their role. They have a clear understanding of pupils' learning needs, especially in reading, and have introduced a range of appropriate interventions to improve progress from the wide range of different pupil starting points. Since the summer term, pupils are writing more frequently and at greater length. Improving the quality of writing and enabling more able pupils to reach higher standards is a school priority.

The school's analysis of the progress of mobile pupils is not as robust as its analysis of non-mobile pupils. Explanation of the effect of the number and percentage of mobile pupils on overall end-of-key-stage-results is not clear enough.

Governors are working more effectively with a smaller governing body and a better committee structure that distributes responsibility more widely. The Leadership and Management Partnership of two governors and two senior leaders has helped to compile detailed self-evaluation, accurate school priorities and well-focussed plans. The governing body has carried out a self-evaluation to identify what it does well and not so well. Governors are aware of the need to develop a longer term vision of the school and to be less pre-occupied with short term issues. New governors bring relevant skills. The governing body does not have any parent governors but recent meetings have generated interest from parents in applying for the role.

Achievement

In 2014, current published data for Year 6 test results includes pupils who are discounted from the school's results because they arrived in England in the last two years. Consequently, this data is unreliable as an indicator of pupils' achievement overall.

At Key Stage 2, in 2014, attainment increased in mathematics, reading, writing, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Despite this improvement, the school is likely to be below the government's floor standards which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. Rates of progress increased markedly in mathematics, remained the same in reading and slowed in writing. Improvement in mathematics was due to more frequent opportunities for mental mathematics and more immediate and precise feedback to pupils about what they need to do to improve. In reading, pupils have weaknesses in their vocabulary and in their skills of inference and deduction. In writing, no pupils achieved level 5. School data shows that the attainment of non-mobile pupils at Key Stage 2 was much higher in 2014 than in 2013 in reading, writing and mathematics.

At Key Stage 1, the headline data shows a three year decline in reading, writing and mathematics to exceptionally low levels. However, school data shows that the attainment of non-mobile pupils was much higher in 2014 than in 2013.

Results of the national screening test of letters and sounds in Year 1 remained below average in 2014. Leaders know that pupils new to English performed least well. These, mainly Slovak, pupils do not have the same understanding of sounds as pupils who speak English as a first language. For example, 'th' is heard as 'd' and 'w' as 'v'. The school is developing other strategies, including word recognition, to develop early reading and has introduced a new speaking and listening programme to accelerate pupils' understanding and discrimination of sounds in English.

At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the proportion achieving a good level of development increased in 2014, but not as much as nationally. As a result, the proportion of children starting Year 1 with a good level of development is below the national figure. However, children who have been at the school since the beginning of the Early Years Foundation Stage progress well and enter Year 1 with an expected level of skills and knowledge.

External support

The local authority consultant headteacher knows the school well, understands its strengths, weaknesses and challenges, and is pro-active in finding support to meet identified needs. He has taken the initiative to research other schools and local authorities that are successfully meeting the needs of new arrivals and pupils new to English. A local partnership with Canklow Primary School helped to improve teaching in Year 6 and in mathematics. Local authority consultants also contributed to improving mathematics. A local authority consultant has effectively supported

teachers with larger numbers of new arrivals or who are new to this challenge. A new school partnership is designed to further develop provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Well managed links with other schools in the local learning community provide helpful support for developing the new curriculum and assessment.

Exploratory talks have been set up with another local authority to find ways of managing the admissions system more effectively to reduce high mobility. Action by the local authority to resolve staffing issues has been too slow.

Further Action

Recommendations for action, which we discussed, include:

- the local authority and governors urgently resolving staffing issues that limit leadership capacity.
- ensuring that the evidence and analysis of the progress of mobile pupils is more robust.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

I would be grateful if you would forward a copy of this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the consultant headteacher from Rotherham local authority.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Cc John Coleman, Senior HMI