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Mrs Paula Martin
Acting Executive Headteacher
Firs Estate Primary School
Raven Street
Derby
DE22 3WA

Dear Mrs Martin

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Firs Estate Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting executive headteacher and acting head of school, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, one additional governor, and two representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. Additionally, the school's revised behaviour policy and documentation relating to exclusions were scrutinised. I visited a number of classes and spoke to some pupils about their work.

Context

There have been no significant staffing changes since the section 5 inspection. Several governors have resigned. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. Governors are currently holding discussions with several potential academy sponsors.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The acting executive headteacher is working effectively with other senior leaders to address the areas identified for improvement at the recent section 5 inspection. They clearly understand the rapid pace of change that is needed and are fully committed to bringing it about. The school action plan is appropriate. It identifies the actions leaders must take in order to raise pupils' achievement with clear, measurable success criteria. However, it does not contain sufficient milestones against which the governing body can monitor progress.

A range of actions has already been taken. For example, both the senior and middle leadership teams have been restructured to develop shared leadership responsibilities at all levels. Senior leaders have been proactive in providing opportunities for all staff, including teaching assistants, to develop their skills through tailored training and support, as well as opportunities to visit another local school to observe good practice. They are strongly focused on ensuring that teaching is pitched at the right level of difficulty for all pupils, including the most able, and that their needs are being met. A new behaviour policy is in place. Pupils report that behaviour is improving and that there are fewer playground incidents, particularly at lunch-time. The school's records show that there has been a reduction in exclusions since the previous inspection.

Despite several resignations, governors have taken urgent steps to improve their role and their impact on school improvement. They are developing a more strategic role and providing greater challenge to senior leaders. They have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The previous inspection recommended that an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils) should be carried out. This is scheduled to take place later this term. Governors are aware that they must act on any recommendations arising from this review.

The local authority's statement of action clarifies what additional support the school will receive. This includes support from the local authority adviser, as well as from other external consultants and through school-to-school support. The authority rightly recognises that current school leaders demonstrate the capacity to steer and drive improvement and that consequently, their role should focus on robust external quality assurance.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector