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Mrs S Masters
Headteacher
Fernhill Primary School
Field Road
Farnborough
GU14 9FX

Dear Mrs Masters

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fernhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- include more specific priorities, targets and deadlines in the school's development plan to show how the groups of pupils who need to make good progress, from now on, will do so
- analyse pupils' progress over the last two years, to find out which groups have not made good progress, in reading, writing and/or mathematics, so that suitable support and challenge can be provided
- visit a school where leaders are recognised for highly effective practice in scrutinising pupils' books as a means of testing out the quality of teaching over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. The meetings focused on the action taken since the last inspection. Together, we made brief visits to all classrooms when I talked to some pupils informally. The school's development plan was scrutinised with a range of other documentation, including information on pupils' attainment and progress, evidence of leaders' monitoring of pupils' work, governors' minutes and notes of visits, and the most recent report from the local authority.

Main findings

You and the deputy headteacher have rightly continued to keep your focus sharply on improving the quality of teaching. You have not allowed the difficulties with recruiting teachers to daunt you and you show relentless determination to move the school to one where all pupils benefit from consistently good teaching. You are expecting pupils' attainment to be much better this year, in Year 6, and have rightly identified that pupils in Year 5 need to catch up quickly if they are to leave the school in a strong position for their secondary education.

While your efforts have been channelled towards maintaining the momentum in improvement, recognised at the last inspection, you have also sharpened your resolve and focus to concentrate on the areas that need particular attention. You and the deputy headteacher are providing tailored support for teachers, including those who are at an early stage in their teaching careers. In this way, you are directing resources, intervention and coaching where they are needed. For example, you have provided training for staff on grammar and how they can model good writing, with their pupils: both are relevant and link in with the area for improvement relating to teaching, pupils' speaking and writing. At no point during my visit was there any hint that the school's improvement had slackened off. On the contrary, all leaders and governors demonstrated a shared sense of purpose and a strong commitment to build on the improvements that were identified at the last inspection.

Governors are aware of the big picture in terms of pupils' achievement this year and know which groups are not yet making good progress. They talk knowledgeably about what the analysis shows and cite examples of the questions they have asked you, to check what action is being taken. Governors' familiarity with the school's data has stemmed from your analysis of the progress made by the different groups in each class, so far this year, in reading, writing and mathematics. The information is presented in a clear way, which gives governors an at-a-glance overview of where the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement lie.

Although you and other leaders are very clear where pupils' learning and achievement needs to pick up, and what is being done about it, this level of detail is not reflected clearly in the school's development plan. It is not explicit enough about

which groups, in which years, need to make good, or rapid, progress from now on, and whether this applies to reading, writing and/or mathematics. As a result, it is hard for governors, and staff, to know, precisely, what the priorities are for the remainder of this academic year and what targets are being set, and expected, for the pupils who have not done well enough. The timescales show when activities and training is occurring but not necessarily what the deadlines are and when leaders would need to review the impact of any work.

You have not yet looked at pupils' rate of progress over, for example, two years. As the school has required improvement during this period, it would be useful to analyse the extent to which achievement has improved, or not, over that time. Importantly, it would signal where pupils' progress has been slower, which would give an added focus and impetus to teachers' work for the remainder of this academic year. For the pupils in Years 1 and 2, you do not have total confidence in the accuracy of these pupils' assessments when they left Reception. As a result, it is more risky to use these assessments to set a baseline for their subsequent progress. We discussed using the next set of reliable assessments as a starting point for these pupils, to determine whether their achievement has been good enough during Years 1 and Year 2.

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

You are making sure that any external support, from the local authority is targeted appropriately to link in with your priorities. You have taken some brave decisions, to amend or redirect the support where it has not been wholly successful. The latest report from the local authority refers to forthcoming support to support leaders' monitoring and evaluating of the school's work. Examples of subject leaders' monitoring seen during this visit did not provide the in-depth analysis that is needed to pinpoint specific weaknesses, to guide teachers' work and further improvements in teaching. Leaders would benefit from visiting a school where leaders scrutinise pupils' work effectively to determine how well their pupils are learning over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector