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24 May 2018

Mrs Annabel Stocchetti and Mrs Janette Teague
Interim Headteachers
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Field Road
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Dear Mrs Stocchetti and Mrs Teague

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fernhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- secure strong, long-term substantive leadership
- tackle the remaining weaknesses in teaching
- track the progress of disadvantaged pupils who do and do not have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities separately to fully understand which pupils are underachieving
- complete the planned work to restructure the school improvement plan.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection were held with you, other senior leaders, three members of the governing body (including the recently appointed chair) and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated.

I visited every class with one of you. We observed learning, looked at pupils' books and talked to pupils about their work. I also observed some short phonics sessions and heard some Reception children read.

Context

The previous substantive headteacher retired in July 2017 following a period of absence due to illness. The previous deputy headteacher led the school in the interim, becoming acting headteacher in September 2017. She left the school in April 2018 to take up a substantive headship elsewhere in the local authority. As the current interim headteachers, you took up your roles at the beginning of this term and will jointly lead the school until July, while also managing your own schools.

There have also been significant changes in teaching staff since the previous inspection. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have become acting assistant headteachers and have provided some stability to the day-to-day operation of the school. An interim special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been appointed to work one day a week. School leaders continue to find it difficult to recruit teachers.

The chair of the governing body took up the role two months ago, following the resignation of the previous post holder.

Main findings

You both agreed to step in to lead the school on a temporary basis because the pupils are 'Hampshire children who deserve a good education'. In less than three weeks you have accurately assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the quality of teaching. You have begun to plan what you can usefully achieve to help the school to improve in the 12 weeks of your tenure.

However, despite your strong moral purpose and clear focus, this short period of strong leadership will not be enough on its own to ensure that the school is good at its next inspection. This is because governors and the local authority do not yet have plans in place for the leadership of the school from September. This undermines the improvements that have been made in some areas of the school.

We agreed that the school improvement plan strategic overview and school action plan documents produced in response to the previous inspection were weak and

duplicated each other. Furthermore, the actions within them cannot be measured and it is not clear how the impact of any of them would be evaluated.

You have already set yourselves the task of streamlining the plans into one document that you are confident will have a definite impact on raising standards. The new chair of the governing body also recently realised that the previous plans were not fit for purpose and has thought about how governors can assess the impact of actions more accurately. However, all this is a whole year too late.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that assessment information is now more accurate. It is being used helpfully to plan learning and any additional teaching needed to help pupils to catch up. The monitoring of teaching has also been more focused in the last year.

Together, we saw some strong, effective teaching that was helping pupils to learn very well and make speedy progress. Pupils were fully involved in developing their knowledge and understanding. Current practice in the early years is especially strong and is helping children to make rapid progress from low starting points. However, such strengths in teaching are not consistent across the school. Leaders have now accurately identified where weaknesses in teaching still exist and you are strengthening plans to tackle them.

Where teaching is weak, the most vulnerable pupils suffer the most. Disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities still make the slowest progress in some classes because of poor teaching. More could be done to identify the barriers to learning for those pupils that have multiple vulnerabilities. For example, a sizeable group of pupils have SEN and/or disabilities in addition to being disadvantaged.

In 2017, the progress pupils made in reading during key stage 2 was extremely low compared to national figures. At the same time, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check rose to be in line with national figures. Despite training and professional development sessions, this very mixed picture in reading outcomes has continued. We observed some very strong practice in teaching reading in certain parts of the school. However, we also observed some much weaker practice in how phonics is taught for those pupils who need to catch up.

Governors care passionately about the school and want to achieve the best for the pupils who attend and the community they serve. The new chair of the governing body is bringing renewed focus to their work. However, this is not yet enough to overcome the uncertainty in school leadership and weaknesses in teaching. As a result, outcomes for pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are not improving quickly and are unlikely to be good at the time of the next full inspection.

External support

The local authority has brokered the current leadership by you both supporting the school as interim headteachers. It has also brokered the services of a SENCo for one day a week for this academic year.

Additionally, the local authority has provided significant additional support from a learning partner and consultants for English, mathematics and early years. This amounts to approximately 30 visits since the previous inspection in January 2017. This support has clearly helped some teachers, including the interim assistant headteachers, to improve their practice. However, despite this extensive support and investment, some teaching remains weak and vulnerable pupils continue to underachieve. This is in part due to changes in leadership and staffing that mean initiatives have not been followed through fully.

There has been some disagreement between the local authority and governing body about the leadership of the school in the future. Nonetheless, the local authority is determined to work with the governing body to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector