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Mrs Teresa Quinn
Headteacher
Fatfield Primary School
Southcroft
Washington
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Dear Mrs Quinn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fatfield Primary School, Sunderland

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 2014, 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection in February 2013 the school was also judged to require improvement, although at that time, leadership and management was judged to be good.

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:

- ensure a review of governance is undertaken as a matter of urgency in order to make sure all governors have the necessary skills to challenge the school to improve further
- ensure governors challenge the leadership of the school more robustly, including by checking and evaluating pupils' achievement data for all year groups, and take prompt action should initial improvements not be sustained

- ensure that the steps being taken to improve the quality of teaching lead to rapid improvement in rates of progress and outcomes for pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised other documents, including minutes of governing body meetings and reports from the local authority. You accompanied me on a tour of the school and we looked at samples of pupils' work, which had a particular focus on checking on improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Context

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher left to take up a headship position and a new deputy headteacher was appointed and took up her post on 1 September 2014. One teacher retired at the end of the summer term and a new teacher has started at the school. A full-time teacher has reduced the hours she works to three days each week and a new supply teacher is covering the other two days. The Chair of the Governing Body resigned and a new Chair took up her role in October 2014. Several other governors have left the governing body and there are currently vacancies for a local authority governor, a parent governor, two community governors and two staff governors. These vacancies are expected to be filled very soon.

Main findings

Governors, senior and middle leaders are now more aware, through looking at nationally published data, that pupils have not been making good or better progress over a considerable period of time. Evidence in the minutes of governing body meetings shows that governors are now beginning to take concerted action to tackle weaknesses, particularly in the leadership of the school. Due to significant changes in the composition of the governing body since the inspection, the review of governance has not taken place. However, the new Chair of the Governing Body is determined to ensure this is conducted as a matter of urgency. HMI has asked to be kept informed when this occurs. Despite past failings, governors now know they need to check, and evaluate, the work of the school more closely and challenge leaders to ensure initial improvements are sustained and built upon to ensure better outcomes for pupils. They have received training on evaluating nationally published data and are now beginning to ask more challenging questions of leaders about pupils' achievement. However, significant work remains to be done by leaders to ensure that pupils make much better progress and that the attainment of all pupils improves rapidly, particularly in Key Stage 2.

The newly-appointed deputy headteacher and middle leaders, are taking positive steps to make improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. The deputy headteacher, as assessment coordinator and special educational needs coordinator, has introduced new assessment procedures and is using the information found to begin to tackle any underachievement. Middle leaders are also helping to ensure improved outcomes for pupils as shown by recent improvements in achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Evidence in pupils' work shows that changes to the curriculum are having a positive effect on their learning. For example when they try to solve a 'Murder mystery' or tackle 'Aztec mathematics', pupils are more engaged and motivated to learn than at the time of the inspection. Pupils are now beginning to write more at length, develop better reading skills, tackle more challenging mathematical problems and to develop better calculation skills. Teachers' marking and feedback are now helping pupils make the necessary improvements to their work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI will maintain direct contact with the school to check upon the actions the governors have committed themselves to.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support, particularly from the School Improvement Officer. She has provided valuable support and advice for governors and training on how to evaluate the school's data which is enabling them to carry out their roles more effectively. A mathematics consultant is working with the newly-appointed mathematics leader and is helping him to develop his leadership skills. The school is also receiving support from a National Leader of Education, the headteacher of Newbottle Primary School. He is helping to improve the leadership and management of the school by working with headteacher and deputy headteacher on evaluating the quality of teaching and has assisted in developing the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector