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30 January 2015

Mrs Lucy Griffiths
Headteacher
South Hetton Primary School
Frederick Terrace
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Durham
DH6 2TJ

Dear Mrs Griffiths

Special measures monitoring inspection of South Hetton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. Her Majesty's Inspector visited lessons and reviewed a range of documentation including pupil progress data, a local authority review of the school's work and recent checks on teaching. The single central record was checked to show compliance with safeguarding arrangements because of the large turnover of staff since the section 5 inspection.

Context

The substantive deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the autumn term; the post is being covered by a senior leader on secondment from another primary school within the local authority. The school is currently recruiting for a permanent deputy headteacher to take up post at the beginning of the summer term. The process of the school becoming part of a local academy trust is well underway and the academy conversion order has been signed by the Secretary of State.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority acted speedily to address the concerns within the inspection report. Actions undertaken are beginning to make a positive difference. For example, support brokered from an outstanding school, Lumley Infant and Nursery School, has led to improvements in the early years classrooms. Following a visit to the support school, a review of the marking policy has led to action which has improved pupils' responses to teachers' written comments and, as a result, pupils are beginning to make faster progress. Local authority education development advisers also fed back strengths and areas for development to every teacher following a scrutiny of workbooks in both English and mathematics. This, together with training on the progression of skills in the new national curriculum, has led to teachers producing more systematic planning which in turn is leading to the pupils making better progress.

Middle leaders are having more impact on the quality of teaching and learning in school because they are more knowledgeable about the school's data and now have dedicated leadership time in which to carry out improvement work in their areas of responsibility. For example, the new subject leader for mathematics has already developed a policy on the teaching of calculation and is adapting this further to show how calculations should be set out throughout the school. Systems to monitor the performance of teachers have been tightened and now include mid-year appraisal reviews for all teachers, including the headteacher, and all teaching assistants.

The review of the governing body's effectiveness following the section 5 inspection is underway; an interim report is expected imminently. The review of the use of pupil premium funding (additional government money) has not taken place; it is scheduled for late February, some four months after the section 5 inspection. In the meantime, the local authority are supporting the governing body in identifying training needs; these include initial induction for some governors, data analysis, performance management and monitoring the day-to-day work of the school for others. However, evidence from minutes shows that governors exhibit an increasing

level of challenge during the regular meetings of the school scrutiny group, which is chaired by senior staff from the local authority.

The school's action plan requires further development. There is insufficient detail about who will monitor and who will evaluate the actions undertaken by the school; especially the actions in relation to the early years. In addition, the lack of numerical milestones makes it very difficult for progress to be judged accurately.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector