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15 November 2012

Mrs Nic Thorpe
Headteacher
Hunningley Primary School
Hunningley Lane
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S70 3DT

Dear Mrs Thorpe

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Hunningley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, other senior and middle leaders, the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and pupils. School action plans were evaluated and documents recording performance management objectives and the outcomes of monitoring activities and were examined.

Context

In November 2012, the consultant headteacher from a partner school, who had been working with the school since July 2012, was appointed as the executive headteacher. The acting headteacher, who had been in post since the beginning of September 2012, was appointed as the head of school. The Chair of Governors resigned in October. The governing body is being reconstituted and the positions are

due to be filled next week. The Early Years leader has stepped down from her post and her role has been filled by the Early Years leader from the partner school.

Main findings

There have been significant changes in leadership since the recent inspection. The acting headteacher, consultant headteacher and the local authority soon recognised that arrangements for leadership and governance were not sufficiently effective. As a result, the executive headteacher and head of school were appointed. The executive headteacher provides stronger direction and expertise which is leading to more focused and decisive action. The executive headteacher and head of school are working together effectively to plan and implement improvements.

As a result of intervention by the local authority, the governing body recognised that its membership was unbalanced and that they were insufficiently informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors acknowledged that they lacked understanding of their role in holding leaders to account. The governing body agreed to be reconstituted as a smaller group with a new chair. This is about to be formalised and prospective governors are highly committed to developing their new role.

The executive headteacher has had a significant impact in a short time. She has introduced a more unified approach to planning based on incisive evaluation and clear priorities. Middle leaders are responding positively to the clarity of direction and expectations. Newly appointed middle leaders are beginning to provide fresh impetus to developing the curriculum and to improving the teaching of letters and sounds at Key Stage 1. Prompt action has been taken to improve the quality of leadership and provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Stronger accountability has been introduced through new performance management objectives which match staff's new responsibilities for bringing about improvement. Lesson observations have provided robust feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. The frequency and accuracy of assessment have begun to increase and a wider range of assessment strategies and more effective moderation have been introduced.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- Develop governors understanding of data and their first-hand knowledge about teaching and learning, and strengthen their capacity for questioning and challenging school leaders.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The external support provided by the executive headteacher has been critical in accelerating the pace of change. Staff and governors are accepting her support and challenge well. Links with staff at the partner school have also been beneficial in modeling alternative approaches for staff to adopt or adapt. The local authority has played a key role in brokering this support for the school and in reconstituting the governing body. These strategic changes have put the school in a stronger position to move forward at a faster pace. The local authority has also provided effective support for developing the leadership of mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector