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2 November 2011

Mr Charles Lindsay
Headteacher
Sandown Primary School
The Ridge
Hastings
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TN34 2AA

Dear Mr Lindsay

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Sandown Primary School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and the pupils gave when I inspected your school on 1 November 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

Since the school was inspected it has been in partnership with another local school which has provided support for staff. A new headteacher joined at the start of the summer term, taking over from an acting headteacher. Two staff, including the Key Stage 1 leader, left at the end of that term. A new coordinator for mathematics and an inclusion manager joined the school and the senior leadership team this term.

As a result of the inspection on 28 and 29 March 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The inspection has raised serious concerns. These will be considered by the appropriate Regional Director, Inspection Delivery, who will decide when the school will receive a further inspection.

Pupils' attainment remains well below that expected for their ages. The progress they make in lessons and over time has not improved so as to address their weak past achievement. The most recent, unvalidated, national assessments for Year 6 pupils show a reversal of a fragile rising trend in mathematics and a fall in English.

Overall school targets were widely missed and far fewer pupils than seen nationally reached the expected levels. Of particular concern is the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those from less advantaged backgrounds, who underachieve. Many pupils have deep-seated weaknesses in literacy; for example, older pupils whose uncertain knowledge of letter–sound correspondence hinders their writing and pupils whose poor speaking skills make it difficult for them to explain their thinking in mathematics. The school is working hard to improve pupils' reading and is starting to make an impact. It is only in reading that there is accurate information about pupils' attainment so that the school can target support effectively. Pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics is not systematically or accurately assessed. In lessons, pupils' attitudes to learning are positive but many lack independent learning skills. Much has been done to improve the learning environment through display and reading areas in each room. Pupils' behaviour is improving because clearer expectations are set out and reinforced through well-balanced sanctions and rewards. The same approach has been taken towards attendance, which has risen well with many fewer pupils regularly missing school.

The steps taken to improve teaching have made a positive impact on some teachers' work and new appointments have boosted the quality of teaching overall. Individual reading recovery sessions are effective and show what can be achieved by skilled staff planning around precise goals. Nevertheless, there is not enough good or better teaching and too much which is satisfactory or inadequate to ensure pupils make the consistently rapid progress needed. The effective teachers accurately assess pupils' attainment and use this to plan exciting lessons which meet their varied needs. A significant number of staff do not do this so that tasks in too many lessons are not well matched to pupils' differing attainment or targets. This leads to poor progress overall but especially for vulnerable groups such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most lessons involve discussion but opportunities are regularly missed to tailor questions for different pupils based on their attainment or to check pupils' understanding before moving on. Additional adults sometimes contribute well to learning but only when they are well briefed by the teacher as to how to support pupils but too often this is not the case.

There is greater consistency in the way teachers seek to communicate learning objectives and criteria to promote successful work in lessons. However, they do not always model or demonstrate their expectations well enough so that pupils fully understand them and are able to move their own learning forward. Key areas of subject knowledge are sometimes poorly taught and lesson activities are inappropriately planned in relation to learning objectives. Most mathematics and writing books are marked regularly. Some commentary is useful and referred to by pupils but too much is either not read or not responded to. Pupils have a very patchy understanding of their long-term targets, making it difficult for them to know if they are making progress. Pupils enjoy the topics studied through cross-curricular themes. Some effective moves have been made to improve support for literacy and numeracy in all curriculum subjects but this is at an early stage.

Improving attendance has been given a high priority. Work involves more accurate analysis of attendance patterns to identify at-risk pupils and a better range of actions to support regular attendance. These include making earlier, closer links with families where there are concerns and by sustaining good communication with them.

The headteacher shows determination to move the school on but is tackling a significant backlog of weak leadership capacity. He has improved behaviour and attendance but has not eradicated poor teaching. For the term after the inspection monitoring of lessons paid too little attention to pupils' learning. Observations did not sharply identify areas needing improvement for each teacher so as to help them move on and enable their progress to be checked. This, together with inaccurate pupil assessment data, made it difficult to hold staff to account or target intervention for underachieving pupils. The headteacher knows that too little has been achieved. More robust action is now being taken to tackle unacceptable staff performance and professional development is better focused on the most pressing areas. Strategic planning in the form of the local authority statement of action was judged fit for purpose after the inspection but there has been insufficient emphasis on its key area of helping teachers to use assessment to support learning. Clarification of leadership roles and the introduction of performance management offer the potential to improve the school but are recent developments. New appointments to the senior leadership team have good skills and are starting to tackle their areas with energy. Partnerships with parents and carers are improving. Nevertheless, the efforts of senior leaders are not all directed as fully as they should be towards improving teaching and too much rests on the headteacher. Governors are supportive but have not challenged the school enough over pupils' weak achievement.

The local authority has provided a wide range of support but this has not been effective in building the school's capacity for improvement or ensuring that teaching moves on quickly. The local authority's own most recent audit of teaching revealed the school's weaknesses to them, alongside the urgent need to re-focus their efforts. Work with the partnership school has included logical activities such as visits by school staff to observe teaching and sharing approaches to performance management with the headteacher. However, the partnership has made too little impact on core areas of leadership, such as monitoring, and improving teaching.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011.

- Raise attainment and progress in English and mathematics by improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, by ensuring that:
 - teachers and teaching assistants take time to question pupils and discuss activities with them, in order to check their understanding and encourage independent learning
 - individual targets and marking are used consistently to show pupils how to improve their work
 - learning proceeds at a quicker pace in lessons.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching as well as any additional support through interventions and relating this to the progress made by pupils using assessment information to quickly identify underachievement, which leads to swift and effective intervention to support improvement
 - establishing a strong leadership team with shared roles and responsibilities.
- Raise the level of attendance by:
 - fully implementing planned actions
 - engaging more effectively with parents and carers to help them realise the importance of regular attendance for their children's learning and progress.