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Friday 14 December 2012

Clare Escombe  
St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School  
Royal Rise  
Tonbridge  
Kent  
TN9 2DQ

Dear Mrs Escombe

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 13 December 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 headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, current data about pupils' progress and documents used in monitoring teaching were scrutinised. A report from the first visit by a consultant from the local authority was reviewed.

#### **Context**

Since the last inspection the headteacher has been absent from the school recovering from illness and the deputy headteacher has led the school. The headteacher will return to the school after Christmas. The new assistant headteacher joined the school in September 2012. Two staff will begin maternity leave during the spring term 2013.

#### **Main findings**

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have responded quickly and with a determined approach to the recommendations from the section 5 inspection. They

are wholly committed to raising expectations of staff and aspirations of pupils so that the school can move from requiring improvement to providing good education. The school improvement plan has been reviewed and leaders have planned carefully how each recommendation can be developed and success measured by all leaders. Action points are clear. Each action point links directly to the critical focus on improving the consistency of teaching and ensuring that all teaching is at least good by the summer term 2013. Action points and timescales are realistic and demanding. The improvement plan requires more detail about the expected impact of each action point to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment of all pupil groups. For example, leaders have identified precisely the gaps in pupils' achievement at the school but in action planning to close these gaps, there is not enough detail about the targets set by the school or national expectations.

Responsibilities of all leaders to drive improvement are clearly stated in the improvement plan. Senior leaders are expecting more of middle leaders who now work in small teams to plan for and evaluate changes to the curriculum. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching, through regular lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work are at the core of the improvement plan and gathering momentum. Processes for the performance management of staff are improving because accountability and expectations are more explicit than previously. Targets for staff are linked to improving achievement of pupils in their class.

The Chair of the Governing Body has provided good support to the deputy headteacher in leading the school this term. Each committee of the governing body has shared responsibility for monitoring the school improvement plan. The overarching strategy committee has a good understanding of findings from recent reviews of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work. The governing body is about to ratify the most recent school improvement plan and the Chair recognises that embedding pupil performance data in the plan needs more attention by governors. There has not been an external review of governance but the governing body are in the process of auditing their training needs to determine how to use bespoke support from the local authority to develop their ability to challenge leaders about pupils' achievement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking 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:

- continually refine the school improvement so that action points and success criteria refer directly to the expected and actual impact of teaching on pupils' progress and attainment
- ensure all middle leaders in each curriculum team are held to account for leading changes in the curriculum and improving teaching
- broker a bespoke package of governor training that helps all governors become more knowledgeable about nationally expected rates of progress, and

gives governors understanding of assessment data to be able to ask demanding questions of leaders about pupil achievement.

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

### **External support**

Senior leaders continue to choose which schools to work in partnership with to identify how best practice in other local schools can be used to support St Stephen's. Links with a Local Leader in Education (LLE) and her school are beginning to help senior leaders at St Stephen's refine their work in monitoring and improving teaching. In recent years the local authority has provided considerable support to the school through much turbulence at senior leadership level. Since the school was judged to require improvement the local authority have conducted one visit to review progress against the recommendations from the section 5 inspection, indicating the school is taking positive action to begin to secure greater consistency in good quality teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**