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16 January 2013

Lisa Vickers Deputy Headteacher
South Borough Primary School
Stagshaw Close
Maidstone
ME15 6TL

Dear Ms Vickers

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to South Borough Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 January 2013, 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 October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with senior leaders, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. A National Leader of Education and neighbouring deputy headteacher also attended meetings. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the inspector also looked at other documents provided by the school, such as monitoring records and the most recent checks on pupils' achievement.

Context

The headteacher recently left the school and the local authority has engaged additional support for leadership, including a National Leader of Education and a deputy headteacher from nearby schools.

Main findings

The newly formed senior leadership team have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. For various reasons, there are concerns about the consistency and quality of teaching in some of the Key Stage 2 classes. Leaders are rightly spending time supporting teachers' planning and ensuring that there is additional support to maximise the impact on pupils' learning particularly in these classes. The senior leaders have focused on improving the quality and usefulness of teachers' marking and feedback. They are using more regular meetings with staff to check how well pupils are achieving, and staff meetings to develop teachers' understanding of levels of pupil achievement and how to use this information in lesson planning. The monitoring of teachers' planning, lesson observations and the work in pupils books is well focused and helpful. The school leaders believe that past assessment information is inaccurate and may not give a true picture of how well pupils are achieving in reading, writing and mathematics. They accept that there is an urgent need to ensure that information is accurate and simple to use by all staff so that a true baseline can be achieved quickly. Although still early in the term, they are moving forward now with renewed vigour.

The school improvement plan has some strengths, particularly in that some of the success criteria are clearly focused on how well pupils are learning, and some of the targets are measurable. Nonetheless, although senior leaders have simplified the previous unwieldy plan, the current plan is still too wide ranging and focuses too much on what adults will do rather than on pupils' achievements.

The governing body is relatively inexperienced and has vacancies so it is not operating at full strength. Nonetheless, six governors took the time to meet with the inspector which shows they are committed to the school, keen to improve their understanding and effectiveness and make a positive difference.

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:

- urgently establish simple and accurate methods of checking and tracking pupils' achievement and progress
- simplify the improvement plan still further and make sure it:
 - relates closely to the areas for improvement identified by the recent inspection
 - has targets based on pupils' learning, which are realistic as well as challenging, and which can be measured to evaluate success at several points during the year

- work with the local authority to further strengthen leadership and governance.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. In the meantime, the school will provide the HMI with an updated improvement plan. HMI will make another visit later this academic year or early in the autumn term. The timing of this visit will be decided in consultation with the acting headteacher and will be focused on teaching, learning and governance.

External support

The local authority has supported the school by taking decisive action to strengthen leadership. They have successfully linked the school with a National Leader of Education and a neighbouring deputy headteacher. These colleagues have started working with the school this term.

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

Sheena MacDonald HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector