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2 July 2013

Ms Caitlin Yapp
Headteacher
Denton Community Primary School
Acacia Road
Newhaven
BN9 0QJ

Dear Ms Yapp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Denton Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, with a group of Year 6 pupils, with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative of the local authority, to discuss action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and relevant documentation reviewed.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the playgrounds for Key Stage One and Key Stage Two have been redeveloped. Improvements include an area for gardening and for nature study. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources have been upgraded, and visualizers purchased to display pupils' work for discussion during lessons. 'Book Look' sessions have been introduced; the parents and carers of Reception pupils are invited into the school to look at their children's work and to share their children's reading. A 'Toast and Talk' club has been set up which offers breakfast and informal support for Year 6 pupils each day.

Main findings

The action plan systematically and in some detail sets out the school's response to the three key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection: attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics; the quality of teaching; and the leadership of teaching. For each, there is a useful overview, outlining the approach to be taken and the outcomes hoped for. These overviews are complemented by a well-structured schedule of actions planned, target dates for completion, the resources required and the people responsible for leading each initiative. Targets are appropriately aspirational, especially those set for raising the standard of teaching to good or better. As headteacher, you are identified as the lead for more initiatives than is practical in the long term, and you are also amongst those monitoring their implementation. These roles need to be separated. Rightly, governors are responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of many initiatives, but there is still some uncertainty about who is to evaluate the impact of action taken to raise the overall quality of teaching. The action plan says too little about the development of middle leaders to strengthen teaching and learning across the curriculum.

With strong support from governors and from the local authority, you have set a brisk pace for improvement. The impact is already visible in the upgrading of the school environment; for example, in the enterprising conversion of previously underused spaces into areas for independent study and creative activities. It is too early to evaluate the impact on pupils' progress and attainment; however, older pupils describe the school as calmer, more orderly and more interesting, with greater scope for learning beyond the classroom. Your deputy head has developed a challenging approach to teaching mental mathematics and to problem-solving in Key Stage Two, and plans for a new mathematics course and related training for staff are well advanced. The more lively and engaging elements being introduced are appreciated by pupils; however, their wish for the curriculum as a whole to be more active and creative is justified – as you acknowledge. Key Stage One pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics are improving, but too slowly to compensate for past underachievement.

In summary, senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- increase pupils' opportunities for active and creative approaches to learning, with a stronger focus on developing independence and enterprise
- secure consistently good or better teaching, especially in Key Stage One
- develop the skills and confidence needed in the schools' middle leadership to support improvement across the curriculum.

External support

The local authority provides well-targeted and confidence-building support through: consultancy; subject support; and training for governors and for staff. Additional support for governors is being provided by the headteacher of a nearby secondary school, who is a Local Leader of Education.

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

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector