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Keith Crawford
Kingstone and Thruxton Primary School
Kingstone
Hereford
HR2 9HJ

Dear Mr Crawford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingstone and Thruxton Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 May 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your head of school and her deputy. I also met with four staff new to the school and the leaders responsible for English, mathematics and special educational needs. I met with four members of the Governing Body, including the Chair of the Governors and spoke with the provider of the external review of governance. I scrutinised information about the progress made by pupils, school improvement plans, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body and the schools records of its recent monitoring activity. I made short visits to seven lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection one governor has left the Governing Body. A parent governor and a community governor have joined the governing body. The Year 1 teacher has returned from maternity leave.

Main findings

There is evidence that pupils are making better progress in English. Attainment in this subject has risen, noticeably in Year 6. Albeit from a low starting point, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the recent Year 1 letters and sounds (phonics) screening check has doubled. New displays used pupils' work to illustrate how the 'success criteria' could be achieved at a range of levels. Staff recognise that this process could be further improved by using more examples as they occur in lessons to further highlight how pupils can achieve at the highest possible level. Effective action has been taken to ensure teachers use the agreed codes more consistently to help pupils improve their spellings and grammar. Your head of primary teaching has correctly recognised that the rate of improvement in Key Stage 1 is not as strong as it is elsewhere in the academy. The links with other effective schools are contributing to improvement by exposing staff to more good practice.

The academy's improvement plans have been adapted to cover all the issues identified at the May inspection. A strength is the further improvements planned for the teaching of phonics from September in recognition that too many pupils have been leaving Year 2 not having achieved the expected level. A further strength is the test analysis that aims to identify the weaknesses in all year groups, so these can be addressed by all staff from September. Appropriately challenging targets have been identified, including some aimed at closing the gaps in attainment that exist for boys, for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special needs. However, these are not yet included in the academy's improvement plan so they can be used to evaluate progress. There are too few opportunities for the Governing body to be involved in checking how well the school is improving.

Staff reported positively on the improved morale because they feel much more involved in decision-making. The performance management of teachers has improved because the process now involves regular reviews of progress towards targets directly related to raising the achievement of pupils. To ensure rapid progress, the head of primary teaching has taken a great deal of responsibility for leading on the improvements and consequently other leaders have not been as involved.

The Governing Body is not scrutinising the work of the school with sufficient rigour. There is no evidence that governors have considered the issues raised at the May 2013 inspection. Data on the progress made by pupils has not been scrutinised in a timely fashion; for instance, the only recent evidence that governors are asking appropriate questions was found in the March 2013 minutes and this related to last year's Year 1 screening check. This critical weakness is the result of there being no suitable committee structure in place and governors are overwhelmingly focussed on the Kingstone High Academy. An appropriate review of governance is planned for September.

Governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure governors fully scrutinise the work of the academy in a timely fashion
- ensure governors have greater access to external support and challenge
- delegate more responsibility to the deputy head and other leaders in the academy
- during lessons, make greater reference to pupils' on-going work in order to clarify how they can achieve at a range of levels.

External support

Partnerships with other local schools are aiding improvement because staff are learning from their observations of age relevant, good practice elsewhere. Cross-school moderation has improved the accuracy of assessments. The provider of the external review of governance has a good awareness of the improvements needed. The Governing Body does not have sufficient access to external support and challenge.

I will visit the academy before December 2013 to monitor the progress you are making.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector