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Mrs J Cerullo
Headteacher
Darenth Community Primary School
Green Street Green Road
Dartford
DA2 8DH

Dear Mrs Cerullo

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Darenth Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 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 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- robustly and regularly monitor the quality of teaching in every class, to assure that it is consistently good enough to reduce pupils' underachievement swiftly
- ensure that pupil premium funding is very carefully targeted at reducing the attainment gap between pupils entitled to free school meals and the others, and that the impact of its use is evaluated.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last

inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and looked at other key documents, including the data about the progress pupils make and records of meetings. I visited each class briefly with you, and looked at samples of pupils' work.

Context

You became headteacher from September 1. You were involved in some key decisions beforehand, including the appointment of three new teaching staff, who also began work at the start of this term.

Main findings

You have hit the ground running. Helped by well organised handover arrangements, you have very quickly come to know the school, and its pupils and staff, in some depth. Astutely, you have put in place clear expectations about the standards you expect and have provided concomitant support to staff. The working atmosphere in the lessons I visited was positive. Acting with others, you have established very quickly a clear whole-school action plan. The plan contains appropriate and challenging objectives, with sharp actions to reach them. The management of the school is business like and focused. You have quickly and excellently organised the data about pupils' progress, which show very clearly how well all key groups of pupils are doing.

These data, and the pupils' work I saw, show that, throughout the school, pupils' attainment in English and, to a lesser extent, mathematics, is much too low. Year 1 pupils are doing particularly poorly. The gap between the attainment of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding, and other pupils, in Years 5 and 6 is far too wide. This gap is, however, smaller, or non-existent, in some other year groups. You talked wisely of having to 'prioritise priorities'. We agreed that using pupil premium funding incisively to redress underachievement quickly is one of the highest current priorities.

We discussed usefully some possible strategies to deal with other important matters. These include improving teaching quickly; supporting the development of senior staff; the attendance and achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils; developing further the school's buildings and outside areas (which have great potential) and the importance of developing the curriculum beyond English and mathematics. I was glad to hear of your forthcoming appointment with the Kent music hub and will be interested to see how that relationship develops. You currently have responsibility for all of the foundation subjects. This is understandable for the time being, and you have already provided useful basic subject guidance for teachers. In the longer run, it is important that the recommendation from the

inspection to develop middle leadership is used to spread out the responsibility for subjects amongst staff.

The governing body is doing sterling work, as reported at the inspection. Its leaders and members are shrewd and persistent. They make useful visits to the school, ask very pertinent questions, represent the community well, and provide valuable support and challenge to you. This is a great asset for the journey ahead. However, senior governors rightly wish to involve other governors more in visiting the school.

You know how vulnerable the school is. You bring very useful experience to deal with this but, as a new headteacher, have understandable learning and development needs of your own. You have made an excellent start but, as you said to me, the proof will be in the difference your work makes to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. To this end, I intend to keep in touch with you by telephone and email, to provide support and challenge, in the next few months. It is very likely that, later in the school year, I will make another visit, on which I am likely to report publically, to inspect the impact on teaching and learning of the changes you have just begun.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing very good support. The linked officer knows the school, and its circumstances, very well. She has a close but challenging relationship with you and the governing body. She and you have discussed the school's circumstances in detail already this term and agreed a well-tailored support package. Your induction is well organised. Rightly, the local authority linked officer praises you for the spotlights you have already shone on the areas of the school most needing improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector