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Mrs K Dodd
Headteacher
Shipbourne School
Stumble Hill
Shipbourne
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Dear Mrs Dodd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Shipbourne School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 not taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- boost urgently the quality of teaching throughout the school, but especially for pupils in Reception and Years 1 to 4, so that all pupils are challenged to make progress at a much quicker rate
- ensure that assessments made of the pupils are fully reliable and can be used to ensure they receive challenging work, and targets, at the level of their capability
- challenge and coach teachers and other staff who work with pupils daily, so that their practice firmly improves.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings were held with you, the previous interim headteacher, representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and other key documents, including local authority evaluations. I observed briefly each of the classes at work and scrutinised pupils' books.

Context

You became headteacher on September 1, although you were involved in some decisions about the school before this. Other teaching staff have also begun work at the school this term.

Main findings

You have inherited a difficult situation and you are aware there is much to do to make Shipbourne School what it could and should be. You have a good vision for the school's future and have established positive relationships with parents, governors and staff. I heard you described, understandably, as a 'breath of fresh air'.

The judgement that the school has not yet taken urgent and incisive action does not mean that anyone managing or working with the school recently has done anything wrong. It primarily reflects the fact that the school has not had stable and consistent leadership, which it needs.

Last term, the interim headteacher and others did useful and well-considered work, as reported in the inspection, which steadied the school. However, it remains the case that pupils' attainment and progress are too low, in all year groups. Teaching is, by your own account, still not good enough to make to change this significantly. The evidence I saw supports this view. The school's data, which show how well pupils are doing in English and mathematics, although better managed than previously, are insufficiently reliable. We cannot be sure this information is fully accurate.

Our joint visits to lessons, as well as the other evidence about teaching you have, indicated that teachers dominate lessons too much and think too much for the pupils. The pupils, at times, become passive, as the last inspection also reported. The work teachers set for pupils is not always sufficiently challenging for them. There is evidence that some of the better teaching is in Years 5 and 6.

You have quickly learned much about individual pupils and their needs. We discussed how important it is for you to get closely alongside each of your staff, in lessons, in order to challenge and help them to improve their practice. When doing this, you will need to be very robust in your judgements and expectations. You need to make sure that every pupil is well challenged and makes good progress over time. You should be supported, and held to account, by the local authority and governing

body. Both of these organisations understand the school's needs. I will also support and challenge you.

We usefully discussed the importance, over time, of improving the school's broad curriculum, across all subjects. It was good to see that the pupils were going out of school, on the afternoon of my visit, for a worthwhile shared educational purpose. We discussed too the value in developing partnerships with other schools and organisations, such as the Kent music hub, to draw on their expertise. We talked about your own development needs, as a new headteacher, and considered together aspects of using the school budget most effectively.

The governing body is appropriately organised and clearly very committed. The governors with whom I met, including the chair, also see the untapped potential in the school. I discussed with them several matters, including ensuring that their visits to the school are closely related to, and part of, the school's strategic plan. Furthermore, you and they need to take full ownership of the school's suitably organised current action plan, which you inherited. This should drive the school's improvement.

In summary, you have made a promising start. But you know that the school is not yet on track to be good at its next inspection. Your task is to change that.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I am likely to visit the school again this term. I am likely also to visit the school later in the academic year and to report publically on that visit.

External support

The local authority is accurate in its judgements about the school. It is providing some useful support and helped oversee the school through an unstable period without a permanent headteacher. It is important that the local authority's officer, newly linked to the school, should quickly agree with you a package of support and advice that will meet the school's specific requirements.

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