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Mrs Liz Miles
Acting Head of School
Silverdale Primary School
Perth Road
St Leonards-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN37 7EA

Dear Mrs Miles

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Silverdale Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 June 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:

- ensure that weak teaching is eradicated swiftly
- revise the otherwise effective school improvement plan so that it contains clear headline targets for the attainment of pupils in all stages

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the Executive Headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils and members of the Governing Body. I spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated important school documents such as the school improvement

plan and the data showing how well pupils are doing in English and mathematics. We toured the school together and made brief visits to several lessons.

Context

Since the inspection, the headteacher has left, as expected. It was not possible to replace her immediately, so the Governing Body has appointed a part-time executive headteacher, who is the substantive headteacher from another school, and you are appointed as acting head of school. A recruitment process for a new headteacher is underway, with a view to making an appointment for April 2014.

Main findings

In a short time, you and the executive headteacher have made many positive changes. A new senior leadership team has been very quickly established. Each member has precise, well-considered, responsibilities, which they understand clearly. You are providing well for the training and professional development needs of all groups of staff, and for their performance management. Links with the headteacher's substantive school are useful to staff in improving their work.

In very quick time, better systems have been established in the school for lesson planning, and for staff to work together in year teams. This provides a strong but flexible basis for future improvement. Members of staff are able to show initiative and leadership. Those staff who are not teachers are involved well and have important roles and a suitable career development structure.

The school improvement plan is well constructed. It addresses clearly the weaknesses identified by the inspection. However, it lacks targets for the attainment and progress of the pupils in each year group. These should be added swiftly, and be demanding, so that everyone knows what to aim for.

This is important because, at present, pupils' attainment and progress is mediocre. Pupils should be doing better. You clearly know this. Boys are not doing as well as they should, especially in Key Stage 1. Standards are too low, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. There are, nevertheless, some pleasing outcomes. For example, the pupils in Reception last year attained well. Pupils' scores in the Year 1 phonics screening improved and some Year 6 pupils reached the highest level 6. You, and the governors, monitor closely the performance of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding. Although a mixed picture, there is evidence that the gap between their progress and that of all pupils, is closing.

You have begun work to improve the quality of teaching. Last week, senior staff observed lessons in every class. This was a useful and important process which is helping to guide you in highlighting the next improvement steps needed. Rightly,

you are insisting on greater consistency in teachers' work across the school. It is good to see that many of these are being achieved well. For example, classrooms are well organised with similar features to each other, such as useful learning walls, which tell pupils important information about their work in class. We also discussed, however, the necessity of ensuring that when you observe lessons, you judge them by how well all of the pupils are learning, not so much by what teachers do.

Quite rightly, you are celebrating improvements, as they occur, with the staff. However, we talked about how important it is to be clear that when something improves in school, it is not necessarily yet good.

We considered some other important areas, such as developing the whole-school curriculum. We also discussed the top priority: improving teaching rapidly, especially that which is weak. The pupils should not be expected to endure poor or lacklustre teaching. We saw examples on our walk around the school of pupils' behaviour deteriorating when the work for them in class was not demanding or engaging enough. The pupils I met with around the school, conversely, were consistently polite and well behaved. They are ready to learn. Improving teaching will be the best behaviour strategy.

The work of the governing body continues to be sharply focused and this is a great asset to the school. Governors have worked effectively in brokering the current leadership arrangements.

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 in regular touch with the school. However, officers leave the school too much to its own devices, given its vulnerability. The local authority should agree with the school, quickly, how it may contribute more to the school's improvement. It should also ensure that the vacancies for local authority governors are suitably filled.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector