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Mrs Toni Deacon
Headteacher
Folkestone, St Peter's Church of England Primary School
The Durlocks
Folkestone
CT19 6AL

Dear Mrs Deacon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Folkestone, St Peter's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 October 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 July 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 leaders and governors should take further action to:

- ensure that targets in the school's improvement plan are sufficiently challenging to make up for pupils' previous underachievement
- include clear milestones in the plan so that senior leaders and governors can check that sufficient progress is being made towards agreed targets and adjust the plan during the year if necessary
- act quickly on the recommendations of the external review of governance as soon as it is completed to strengthen leadership and the impact of governance.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the two assistant headteachers, the reading manager, a local authority improvement adviser and five members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We walked around the classrooms and I looked at a range of documents that you provided for me which included minutes of governing body meetings,

records of recent lesson observations, information about pupils' achievements and notes of visits from different local authority advisers. The school improvement plan was also evaluated.

Context

There have been a significant number of changes since the most recent section 5 inspection. Two of the school's four teachers have left. The leadership of the school has been reorganised so that the vacant deputy headteacher post has been filled by two assistant headteachers, one of whom was new to the school in September. A part-time reading manager also joined in September to implement a new approach to teaching reading across the school. One teacher has been off sick since September and is due to return at the beginning of November. Another teacher will be leaving at the end of December. A replacement has already been recruited. Of the six governor vacancies at the last inspection, five have been filled. Elections are underway to fill the one remaining parent governor vacancy. Most teaching assistants are now supporting pupils in different classes.

Main findings

You have taken incisive action to strengthen the capacity of leaders to improve the school. Expectations about the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils should be making have been raised. Appropriate steps are being taken to tackle weaknesses and additional training and support is being provided for teachers who need to improve their classroom practice.

Regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning take place. Teachers have appropriate annual targets to raise standards and improve the progress that pupils make in their class. The local authority has carried out joint lesson observations with you and so is confident that you accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in lessons and give clear feedback to teachers about what they need to improve. You have been quick to observe the new teachers who joined in September so you understand their strengths and where they need further training and support.

A new approach to teaching reading and writing across the school has been recently introduced. All staff currently present in the school have received relevant training and advice to help them put the approach into practice consistently. Reading books have been reorganised so that pupils can make choices about which books they read. Parents are being increasingly supported to help their child read at home.

The way the school marks pupils' work has been reviewed. Some time is now set aside every day for pupils to look at the comments that their teachers have made and make any improvements suggested. Teachers have been given specific guidance on how to mark work accurately, identify any gaps in learning and link pupils' targets more closely to improving their areas of weakness.

The school's improvement plan includes appropriate priorities. Targets are measurable but not sufficiently challenging to ensure all pupils make up for any previous underachievement. Precise milestones so that governors and senior leaders can check that enough progress is being made towards the end-of-year targets are lacking.

Effective steps have been taken to make sure the school now has a full complement of governors. The governing body has been mindful to seek governors with the skills and knowledge needed to fill the role. The organisation of the governing body has been streamlined but the work of the strategy group is new and still developing. Governors are well-supported by the new, experienced clerk. Minutes of meetings show that they are beginning to ask more challenging questions of senior leaders and have a clearer understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the governing body has placed an appropriate emphasis on governor training and visiting the school to see for themselves that relevant changes are being made.

The external review of governance recommended at the last inspection has not taken place. Governors have recently asked the local authority to conduct the review and requested that it includes a scrutiny of documents, face-to-face discussions and observations of governing body meetings. The outcomes must be sent to the governing body quickly so that they can respond swiftly to make up for the delay in carry out the review.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. The governing body should email me the outcomes of and their response to the external review of governance as soon as it is available. I will make contact with you in the spring to discuss the progress that the school has made since this visit in improving teaching and learning.

External support

The local authority has provided relevant training, support and consultancy to the school to help leaders improve teaching and strengthen leadership. The accuracy of assessments and quality of feedback has been an appropriate focus of staff training by local authority advisers. Good leadership and teaching practice from a local outstanding school is being shared. Leaders have rightly registered to attend one of Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminars in November.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director of Education, Learning and Skills for Kent.

Yours sincerely
Jackie Krafft

Her Majesty's Inspector