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Mr D Evans
Headteacher
Ringmer Primary School
Harrisons Lane
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BN8 5LL

Dear Mr Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ringmer Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 January 2014, 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 November 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:

- the allocation of roles and responsibilities amongst senior leaders is balanced, practical and sustainable
- there is a clear distinction between those responsible for overseeing that an agreed action is carried out and those evaluating its impact
- the targets and expected outcomes for each set of actions are specific and precise enough for progress to be measured accurately
- curriculum planning and teaching raise standards in writing and fully challenge more-able pupils
- links with other schools are further developed to extend the range of experience and expertise available to your staff.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and staff. Points raised in telephone conversations with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority were followed up at the end of the day during the feedback and discussion, which both attended. I briefly visited all classes to see the school at work, and I met a group of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils. I reviewed the school's development plan and curriculum outline, reports by your School Improvement Partner and minutes of governors' meetings. I looked at responses from parents and carers entered on Ofsted's website, Parent View, and at the analysis of the school's results over the past three years presented on RAISEonline.

Context

Since the last inspection the senior leadership team has been restructured. Changes to the curriculum include a move to whole-school topics intended to cover the National Curriculum in an integrated way. Phonics packs have been provided for the families of pupils in Year 1 who are not yet reaching the required standards in reading. Plans for the substantial redevelopment of the school have progressed, with building scheduled to start in the coming school year.

Main findings

Your response and that of the governors to the section 5 inspection judgements have been constructive. The local authority had already identified the school as causing concern and, initially as acting head of school with the support of an experienced executive head, you clearly understood the need for more consistently effective teaching and a more engaging curriculum to raise pupils' achievement. Now, as the substantive headteacher, you bring high expectations and are modelling a practical approach to the monitoring of teachers' planning and effectiveness in the classroom. As yet, that responsibility is not being shared across senior and subject leadership.

The Chair of the Governing Body is both supportive and challenging. Under his leadership, governors are extending and reinforcing their knowledge and skills with a sense of urgency. The first stage of an external review has taken place and been judged practical and rigorous. The Chair and other governors have undertaken or have planned training designed to make them more confident and more effective as critical friends, able to interpret information about pupils' achievement and to monitor the impact of teaching.

Priorities set out at the start of the development plan extend beyond the recommendations made in the last inspection report. They bring together in a persuasive way strands from the 'Every Child Matters' framework: pupils' health and safety; their academic achievement and enjoyment of learning; their contribution to the school and its wider community; and their preparation for the next stage of their

education. When that is translated into the action plan, the roles and responsibilities of your senior leadership team are not clearly defined as a first step to whole-school improvement. The expected outcomes are not always specific enough for progress to be measured accurately. You and your senior team are identified as together leading each initiative but individual responsibilities and accountability not set out clearly. It is also not clear whether governors are to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken. The need to work within a very limited budget leads to some difficult compromises; for example, the school's inclusion manager is part-time despite the high proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need and those requiring support both in school and through liaison with external agencies.

With support from the local authority and other consultants, you have established a topic-based curriculum across the school, which is encouraging pupils to apply knowledge and skills developed in one area to questions and challenges presented by another. The impact is beginning to show; there are, for example, short pieces of imaginative and vivid writing by pupils displayed in classrooms and corridors. The Year 5 and Year 6 pupils I met were emphatic that much had improved under your leadership but all wished that they had more opportunities to write freely and at length on topics and in a style of their own choice and to 'just read for pleasure'. Whereas there is widespread and conspicuous support and encouragement for less able and vulnerable pupils, much given by specialist teaching assistants, there is less visible evidence of opportunities and challenge for the more able.

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 has provided carefully targeted consultancy and training to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and writing, and has supported individual teachers through programmes such as 'Every lesson counts'. The School Improvement Partner provides a usefully objective assessment of progress. The local authority is also fully involved in the school's plans and funding for redevelopment.

Your school belongs to a local cluster group in which common concerns and examples of effective practice are shared. While this is a valuable resource, you and your senior leaders rightly plan to spread your net wider so as to capture a broader range of good and outstanding practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector