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Mrs Sara Wakefield
Headteacher
Palmarsh Primary School
St Georges Place
Hythe
Kent
CT21 6NE

Dear Mrs Wakefield

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Palmarsh Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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:

- simplify the data included in the school plan so that it is more concise and provides clearer information to help evaluate what improvements have been made and what more needs to be done
- link the focus of governor visits to the priorities for improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher, five members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We walked around the classrooms

and I evaluated the school improvement plan. I looked at a sample of pupils' books and range of documents that you provided for me which included information about the progress that pupils make in different classes and subjects, records of how teaching and learning are monitored and notes of visits from local authority and external consultants.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection one teacher has left. The deputy headteacher is now teaching the mixed Year 5 and 6 class. A vacancy in Year 1 is being covered for four and a half days a week by a teacher who previously provided planning time for teachers. One teaching assistant has left and the others are being used to support pupils with statements of special educational needs. One governor has resigned.

Main findings

You and your deputy have been quick to respond to the outcomes of the last inspection. A thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses that the inspection identified has been used to focus a detailed plan for improvement. Actions are relevant and timely. How well actions are being implemented is checked systematically. These checks are regularly supported by leaders from local outstanding schools to validate your judgements and to ensure that the school's monitoring is robust.

Actions in the plan are clearly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. A wealth of data is included to measure pupils' progress and some indicate that improvements are beginning to be made. However, some measures included are not concise or clear enough to help leaders and governors see the big picture about what is improving and where more needs to be done. The inclusion of average figures for example, can mask variations in performance, particularly where cohorts are small, and does not show whether pupils who need to make more progress to catch up for any previous lost ground are doing so.

The school's approach to marking has been revised and pupils' books show that it is being used more consistently. Pupils are also beginning to respond to teachers' comments. A new handwriting policy has been implemented and time is planned every day for pupils to practise their skills. Specific, additional support is given to pupils who need further help. Teaching assistants are being used in a more targeted way with specific pupils. They are receiving training to make sure they are able to support these pupils in lessons more effectively.

A number of non-negotiables for teachers have been established. All pupils are expected to read with an adult three times each week. Reading records are checked regularly by you and your deputy to make sure this expectation is being met. The number of volunteers who read with pupils has increased.

The local teaching school has worked alongside teachers in their classrooms to help them become more skilful at providing work for pupils of different abilities that is at the right level. The school has identified that teachers continue to need help with this aspect of their work so more support is being planned. Two teachers are participating in a 'good to outstanding' programme.

Appropriate steps are being taken to strengthen leadership and management. The deputy headteacher is increasingly involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning with you and leaders from other schools. Opportunities to visit other schools and meet with a local group of deputy headteachers have also been provided.

Governors have remained focused on the priorities for improvement, ask challenging questions and provide support to make sure the school is heading in the right direction. They are considering how to further develop the deputy headteacher's leadership skills given his current teaching commitment. Governors report on their visits to the school but the focus of these visits could more usefully be linked to the priorities in the school improvement plan.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will contact the school in the summer to discuss what further progress has been made in tackling the areas requiring improvement.

External support

The school is taking full advantage of the expertise in local schools and has commissioned external consultants to provide support and challenge. Their support is linked specifically to the priorities in the improvement plan. The work with local schools, including the teaching school, is helping to strengthen the rigour of the school's monitoring as well as supporting teachers to improve their classroom practice. Local authority advisers have also provided additional support in the Early Years Foundation Stage and with checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. However, the school has not received records of all the visits made by external consultants working with the school on behalf of the local authority.

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