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Miss Margaret Pease
Headteacher
Southwood Primary School
Keppel Road
Dagenham
RM9 5LT

Dear Miss Pease

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southwood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 April 2014, 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 second 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 teachers, leaders and governors are checking that the additional support provided for more vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs, those eligible for the pupil premium funding and those who join the school after the start of the year, is helping them make better progress
- quickly embed new leadership and governance teams so that the pace of recent improvements is maintained and standards continue to rise.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was reviewed, along with other documents demonstrating the impact of recent improvements. We visited all classes during a tour of the school.

Context

You have decided to retire at the end of this term and a new headteacher will be appointed for next year. An additional assistant headteacher joined the senior leadership team in April 2014 and leadership roles and responsibilities have been reviewed. Three teachers have left the school since my last visit and three new teachers have been appointed. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of additional experienced governors. All governor vacancies have now been filled and a new Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body have been elected.

Main findings

Since my last monitoring visit you have rewritten your action plan. Timescales are realistic and milestones to check how quickly improvements are happening have been included. Actions are being monitored closely and the impact on pupils' achievement is regularly measured. This is helping you to plan for extra interventions if pupils are making less progress than they should. For example, you have identified that some pupils in Year 4 are in danger of not achieving their targets for English. You have therefore changed how they are taught so they receive additional support in lessons. Leaders and governors are monitoring this intervention carefully to make sure it is making a difference to pupils' progress.

Your tracking shows that more pupils are making improved rates of progress. Standards in writing are rising overall as a result of additional staff training and more opportunities for pupils to write for longer periods. Closer monitoring is leading to improved standards of teaching across the school and teachers are held to account for the progress their pupils make. However, the additional support provided to more vulnerable groups and individuals, has yet to be fully evaluated. This is because monitoring systems to check they are making good progress have still to be agreed.

Together with other leaders and governors you are now taking swift and decisive action to improve the school. Leaders are increasingly aware of the schools' strengths and areas for development. However, recent and pending changes to senior and middle leadership teams and the governing body mean new monitoring,

coaching and mentoring roles have still to be fully implemented and the impact of the changes evaluated.

Parental engagement with the school has improved. Senior staff are ensuring that they are available to speak to parents at the start and end of the school day. Your recent survey shows that parents have appreciated this and feel that the school has improved how it communicates with them.

An external review of governance has now been completed and governors have acted quickly to implement the recommendations. They are generous with their time and support, making over 100 visits to the school in the spring term. As a result, governors are offering improved levels of challenge to school leaders because they have a better understanding of the school. Governing body minutes record the searching questions they are asking about pupil progress and how you are improving the quality of teaching.

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

You have benefitted from support using a number of external sources. All staff participated in a six week training programme provided by the Tollgate Teaching Alliance. Teachers and leaders are provided with opportunities to visit other schools to observe examples of outstanding practice. As a result, they reflect on their own teaching strategies and identify where further improvements can be made. A number of external consultants are working with you to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You consider that their support has been effective because more pupils are now making good progress in these subjects. The local authority has supported you to recruit and train new governors and is providing advisory teachers to help you make improvements in the areas identified within the inspection report.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector