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24 April 2014

Cathy Farthing  
Headteacher  
Staplehurst School  
Gybbon Rise  
Staplehurst  
Tonbridge  
Kent  
TN12 0LZ

Dear Mrs Farthing

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Staplehurst School**

Following my visit to your school on 24 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. With you, I visited most classrooms in the school. I also examined the single central record.

### **Context**

Since the inspection, five members of staff have left the school including the leaders for early years, literacy and for mathematics. Two of these leadership posts have been permanently filled; however there are still three temporary teachers in post in the school.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Since the inspection you have taken swift and vigorous action to improve the areas identified in the report. The arrival of a new local authority improvement advisor has intensified the pace of improvement from January.

One of the key initiatives that you have introduced is frequent meetings about pupils' progress with teachers. These focused discussions about how well pupils are doing in specific classes are successfully raising teachers' expectations and sharpening their understanding of how to help pupils learn better. They also provide an effective vehicle for you and the deputy headteacher to model an analytical and evaluative approach for middle leaders. This has resulted in their sharper understanding of data about pupils' progress and an improvement in the way in which they hold other teachers to account.

Your explicit focus on improving writing across the school supported by effective training for teachers is starting to impact on the quality of work produced by pupils. This, with an insistence on good, consistent presentation is demonstrated by fine examples of pupils' written work displayed throughout the school. Your swift purchase of a useful literacy programme has also contributed to pupils making accelerated progress in writing.

A new leader of mathematics has been appointed and, in addition, the deputy headteacher is now teaching mathematics to a high ability group of Year 6 pupils who are aiming for the highest levels in the summer tests. Teaching assistants have been specifically trained to support pupils who need additional help in mathematics. The termly progress data shows that children are now making much better progress than previously in this subject.

Teachers' marking and feedback to pupils are improving as a result of your relentless scrutiny of pupils' books and your regular meetings with groups of pupils to check their progress. However, feedback comments are not always appropriate to the age of the child, and are not always followed up by pupils. This remains a work in progress.

Senior leaders' lesson observations, demonstrate that the bespoke programme of training that you have put in place is improving the quality of teaching. Leaders' judgments are regularly validated by external visitors such as local authority officers. Quite rightly you are matching what you see in the classrooms with the pupils' work in order to come to an accurate judgment about how much progress pupils are making over time. Observations show that the majority of teaching is now good, and none is inadequate.

You have organised useful visits to outstanding schools for a range of teachers and for yourself. This will continue this term, and is a positive addition to the school's successful collaboration with other local schools.

The local authority improvement adviser has supported the school well since January. Work on how pupils' progress data are presented has been particularly useful; teachers are now able to use data to identify which pupils need additional help and to make well-informed interventions. Governors are also able to ask more sharply directed questions of school leaders. The headteacher is held to account through regular meetings and this has undoubtedly contributed to the speed at which the school is moving forward.

Submission of the local authority's statement of action was late and it was incomplete due to a clerical error. Disappointingly, the school did not receive the local authority's completed statement of action until mid-March, three months after the inspection. The alacrity of the headteacher and governors in producing their own improvement plans meant that this did not slow the pace of improvement. The completed statement of action is thorough and addresses all aspects identified for improvement with useful strategies for support.

An external review of governance was held in January 2014. This found that there had been clear improvements in the ability of the governing body to challenge and hold school leaders to account and to measure the impact of actions taken. A useful weekly monitoring group has been set up by governors in which they review the pace of improvements in the key areas with senior leaders and occasionally the local authority improvement advisor. As a result of some effective training, governors are more confident in their understanding of pupils' progress data and have begun to focus more robustly on the progress made by pupils in receipt of the pupil premium funding. Governors now have a positive rapport with staff through their more frequent visits to classrooms. Feedback reports from these visits are astute and useful for school leaders. Governors, and the local authority, are confident of your capacity to lead the school out of serious weakness.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**