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Mrs Kyra Ward
Headteacher
Hellingly Community Primary School
North Street
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Hailsham
East Sussex
BN27 4DS

Dear Mrs Ward

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hellingly Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2014. 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:

- Review the school's improvement plan to include more detail about responsibilities, timescales and monitoring activities, including for governors.

The local authority should take further action to:

- Sharpen its support for the school by providing reports, after advisory visits to the school, which are more accurate and detailed.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. Together, we visited all the classrooms. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. I analysed the school's improvement plans and looked at a wide range of documentation including governing body records and local authority reports.

Context

There have been no major changes at the school since the inspection.

Main findings

You responded promptly and intelligently to the findings of the inspection. In particular, you made links between the need to improve pupils' achievement in writing and observations in the inspection report about pupils' engagement in their learning. You immediately extended successful strategies for teaching reading and writing, already introduced into Key Stage 1, into Key Stage 2. As a result, pupils are now more engaged in writing and keen to extend their skills. In every literacy lesson I saw pupils engaged and motivated to do well. This included in Year 3 where the transformation of the classroom into a "crime scene" was making boys eager to write. In Year 1, I saw a group of pupils working away from the class with a teaching assistant, eagerly exploring their theme through role-play before writing.

You have been clear with teachers about how teaching needs to improve so that it is consistently good in all classes. You have arranged suitable training for the whole team and specific opportunities for individual colleagues. These activities have been matched closely to the areas identified for improvement. The information you shared indicates that as a result, better teaching is resulting in faster progress, including for pupils entitled to free school meals and those with special educational needs.

You and the deputy headteacher now meet every term with each class teacher, to review their pupils' progress. Sensibly, you are careful to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments before you rely on these to underpin your meetings. However, these meetings do not include enough scrutiny of all the different groups of pupils, including the most able.

The way you check the quality of teaching is now more comprehensive, and includes reference to pupils' progress and work in their books. This means that you have a more accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and that your feedback to teachers is more helpful. You shared examples with me of where this is making a real difference to the quality of teaching. However, your system for checking the quality of teaching does not yet include sufficient checking whether

teachers have achieved the progress for groups and individuals which you discussed with them in your meeting.

Soon after the inspection you drew up an action plan to steer the improvement which is required. This plan addresses all the areas identified in the section 5 report and sets out targets for pupils' progress. The plan lists relevant actions and gives some information about how the school will review these and measure success. However, progress targets are too general, and the plan is not specific about who is responsible to lead and secure each area of improvement, and by when. While governors are shown to have a role in checking progress, there is no information about how this will be done. It is disappointing that these omissions were not identified when the school shared the draft plan with the local authority.

The governing body is fully committed to holding leaders to account for the improvement of the school. The new Chair of the Governing Body is experienced and knowledgeable. With current opportunities for recruiting new governors, the current governors are aware of the need to ensure a suitable range of skills and experience. The external review of governance has been completed and prompt action has been taken on key recommendations. A slimmer committee structure now ensures clarity about roles and responsibilities without duplication, and meeting notes record governors asking increasingly searching questions of leaders. However, while monitoring responsibilities have been allocated, governors have not yet decided exactly how this checking will be done and what external advice is required to inform and support their judgements.

External support

The external review of governance, furnished by the local authority, is detailed. Its findings and recommendations were borne out by the visit of her Majesty's Inspector. Since the inspection, the local authority has provided training in behaviour and e-safety and this has been valued in the school. However, strategic support for the school's improvement has been lacking. A local authority analysis of standards in 2013 mistakenly indicated to the school that it could expect to receive "good" judgements for pupils' achievement in an inspection. This advice undermined the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation as inspection approached. Since the inspection, local authority visit reports have been too brief to be helpful.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector