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Mrs Bernadette Lax  
Headteacher  
Herne Bay Infant School  
Stanley Road  
Herne Bay  
CT6 5SH

Dear Mrs Lax

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Herne Bay Infant School**

Following my visit to your school on 13 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 January 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:

- make sure an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding takes place as a matter of urgency
- ensure governors develop a meaningful action plan in response to their external review which strengthens their impact on the school's improvement
- link the governing body with another local, rapidly improving governing body to share best practice in holding leaders to account
- use the pupil progress milestones in the school improvement plan to check that actions taken are making a difference.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your acting deputy headteacher, six members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. We walked around the classrooms and I evaluated the schools' improvement plan. I looked at a range of documents that you provided for me which included the monitoring and review summary, notes of visits from the local authority advisers, records of governor visits, the report following the external review of governance, action plans and a teaching support plan.

## **Context**

Since the last section 5 inspection there have been high levels of staff sickness absence, including in two of the Year 1 classes. Three of the four reception teachers are leaving at the end of July. One Year 2 teacher has left and the class is being taught by two supply teachers. Another Year 2 teacher will be working part time from September and sharing the class with a teacher returning from maternity leave. Currently, five of the seven teacher vacancies for September have been filled. Support staff have been restructured, resulting in some redundancies. One governor has resigned and two parent governor vacancies have been filled.

## **Main findings**

Despite significant staff absence, senior leaders have not been diverted from the key priorities for improvement. Since the last inspection, with support and challenge from local authority advisers, a useful improvement plan has been developed which is focused on the areas where the school needs to do better. The plan includes quantifiable targets and clear milestones to help leaders and governors check that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress improves each term. However, a separate document to monitor and evaluate the improvement plan is not manageable or helpful to governors because it does not use the crucial pupil progress and teaching milestones in the improvement plan.

The focus of classroom observations by leaders and visits by governors has been aligned to the priorities for improvement. Leaders now follow up action points from their observations more systematically to check that any recommendations made are put into practice by teachers. Support and training plans help any teachers who do not reach the school's higher and clearer expectations.

In the reception classes, training and advice on managing behaviour and planning activities that interest and challenge children of different abilities are making a difference. Observations show that children are more involved in purposeful tasks so concentrate for longer and become less distracted. Reception teachers and teaching

assistants plan together each day to make sure activities, particularly in the outdoor area, are based on observations of what children need to learn next.

The quality of feedback and marking in pupils' books is looked at regularly to make sure it gives pupils the information they need to improve their learning. More needs to be done to make sure there is high-quality feedback to pupils in all classes and that all teachers can accurately judge how much progress their pupils make through the year.

Governors are beginning to understand how they need to hold leaders accountable for the quality of teaching and learning by using the school improvement plan and asking probing questions. The external review of governance has been too slow to complete and is of poor quality. The governing body has only very recently received the report which tells them little more than the last inspection about what they need to do better. The lack of urgency in completing the review means that governors do not have the detailed information they need to plan how they are going to rapidly become more effective. The recommendation for a review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding has not taken place. The headteacher has had significant difficulties identifying a suitable person to carry out the review, which needs to take place as a matter of urgency. The delays in both reviews have hindered the development of the governing body and its contribution to the school's improvement journey.

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 visit again in the autumn to look at how well milestone measures are being used to assess the school's progress, including by observing a governors' meeting.

### **External support**

Well-focused support, balanced with effective challenge, from the local authority school improvement advisers has helped senior leaders develop their improvement plan and contributed to improvements in the reception classes. Links with other local schools have been used sensibly to improve classroom practice and share key documents. The local authority has rightly identified that the governing body would benefit too from linking with another local, rapidly improving governing body.

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**