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10 June 2014

Mrs K Dodd
Headteacher
Shipbourne School
Stumble Hill
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Tonbridge
Kent
TN11 9PB

Dear Mrs Dodd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Shipbourne School

Following my visit to your school on 9 June 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 May 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 most recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that, after the re-organisation of classes for the next school year, there continue to be careful checks on the quality of teaching
- continue to raise expectations of pupils in subjects across the whole curriculum, and particularly in writing

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, members of the Governing Body and spoke with representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We visited lessons and an assembly together, looking at samples of

pupils' work. I evaluated documents with you, such as the school's strategic plan, minutes of meetings and data about how well pupils are progressing in English and mathematics.

Context

A new teacher started work in the infant class in January 2014. You expect to change the structure of classes, and appoint some new staff, for September 2014.

Main findings

This has been a very good year for the school. As I reported in September 2013, you inherited a difficult situation but had made a promising start. That promise is really coming through. You have led the school, in your first year of headship, with considerable determination and clarity of purpose. You have worked hard and drawn people across the school community together in a shared, common purpose, winning respect. Well done, Karen.

You speak of wanting to lead a school which has 'an edge': always considering new ideas, learning from others and thinking sharply. This is what I have seen on this visit. The school seems to have a wider, fuller view of what is possible than it did. Members of staff have responded well to your leadership and coaching, as well as the training and development opportunities available. Many are rightly taking on greater responsibilities themselves. Mathematics is increasingly well led, for instance, by a senior teacher. You have broadened the curriculum, so that pupils have a broader range of interesting and exciting activity. It was good, for instance to hear of the swimming gala, netball tournament and other increased sporting activity.

The result of this is a school which is very different, and notably better, than it was. Pupils increasingly enjoy their lessons. Their attendance rate is a little above average. They work well independently and together, demonstrating positive attitudes to their learning. They are supportive of each other. Teachers, and other staff, have increased the level of challenge and interest in many subjects, especially English and mathematics. I enjoyed seeing younger pupils fascinated by a minibeast hunt, recording and checking their findings keenly and accurately. The school's outdoor spaces are pleasant and well organised; we agree they should be used to maximum benefit all year round. Indoors, the school is interesting and welcoming to pupils. In the Year 3 and 4 classroom, pupils were very clear about how they should use connectives to improve sentence construction. Their writing, over time, was of a fair standard. It was carefully marked, with pupils able to explain how they had used the marking to improve their work. In Years 5 and 6, pupils were engaged well in suitably challenging mathematics activities, at different, appropriate, levels of difficulty. They then confidently led an assembly about the environment and recycling.

The teaching briefly observed in all of these lessons was precise and well-focused, with teachers giving clear explanations and asking relevant and challenging questions. Pupils appear to have much better opportunities to think for themselves, and are responding positively. This indicates the correctness of your own evaluations of teaching, which show clear improvement and which have been moderated by the local authority.

The school's data about the progress of pupils in English and mathematics is now better organised and much more accurate. It has been successfully externally moderated. The indications are that this year's end of key stage results in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6 are all sound and show improvement. Most pupils have made at least fair progress and have reached the expected levels. Some pupils have attained at the higher levels. We agreed that there is scope, in future years, for the expectations to be higher still, as the school continues to grow in confidence, especially in writing. The small number of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding make as good progress as their peers, and are suitably provided for; however, the school needs to aim to narrow the gap between their attainment and that of others.

The school's main strategic plan is a useful, simple and well-constructed working document. It is good to see that you have broadened its scope over the year. We discussed how it could be sharpened up further still and also some have longer term objectives: 'keeping your feet on the ground, but eyes on the horizon.' We discussed the success you have achieved in ensuring that the curriculum is broad and interesting. At this stage, this breadth sometimes depends on one-off or short-term activities (in music for example). In the longer run, it will be useful to have these activities integrated within long-term curriculum plans. We discussed how the partnerships you have developed well with other schools may become useful in developing greater depth of learning across all the subjects.

You and your governors continue to work effectively together. The governing body is both challenging and supportive. The governors with whom I met are very knowledgeable about the school and committed to it. They are rightly thinking carefully with you about strategic matters, such as the future size and organisation of the school. You have made sensible changes to the class structure for the next school year. We discussed the importance of continuing to focus very carefully, right from the start of the new academic year, on assuring and sustaining the improvements in teaching, within the new structure.

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

The local authority provides frequent and well-organised support. It evaluates the school robustly, which has been useful to you and the governing body. You are pleased with this and very clear about how the mentoring and advice you have drawn on has really helped you in your leadership tasks. It is good to hear that a similar type of support is proposed for next year.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector