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Mrs C Robinson
Headteacher
Coxheath Primary School
Stockett Lane
Maidstone
ME17 4PS

Dear Mrs Robinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Coxheath Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 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 March 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 that its current improvements in leadership are sustained and developed
- pay continuing close attention to improving the quality of teaching and ironing out inconsistencies.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils and members of the governing body, to discuss the action taken since the inspection and my previous visits. I held discussions with two representatives of the local authority. Together, we made short visits to lessons in all classes, looking at pupils' work. I

evaluated documents, including the school improvement plan, data about pupils' progress, meeting minutes and reports from the local authority.

Context

Since my previous reported visit, the deputy headteacher has left the school. The senior and middle leadership teams have been reformed. One new senior leader, at assistant headteacher level, has been appointed to join the school in September. Another, similar, appointment is pending.

Main findings

There are clear signs of recent improvement. As headteacher, you have become better focused on leading the school, rather than closely managing it. As a result, under your guidance, other senior and middle leaders have developed their roles reasonably well and their work is beginning to impact positively on outcomes for pupils. Teachers now use more consistent practices across the school. For example, in all classes there are now similar methods for marking pupils' work, for helping pupils to understand and evaluate their learning and for improving their handwriting. Pupils like these changes. Those with whom I met said that they found their work increasingly challenging and thought that they were making better progress.

Recent school data about pupils' progress and attainment mainly supports the pupils' view. Year 2 pupils are on track to attain well in their national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. Many Year 6 pupils have made some strong progress this year and the indications are that the results will be at least reasonable. Many pupils entitled to the support of the pupil premium have caught up somewhat with their peers and have made pleasing progress. In the Reception year, recent improvements in teaching and the indoor and outdoor learning environment have started to show positive impact on how well pupils learn.

However, these positive data mask some inconsistencies in quality. Pupils fare better in some year groups than others. There are rightly, for example, concerns about the level of progress by pupils in Year 3 across the year, especially in writing. In a complex pattern of achievement across the school, pupils' progress in writing is generally below that in reading and mathematics. As headteacher, you know, and we have discussed, the importance of ensuring that the quality of teaching, and its dependability, continues to improve, so that such inconsistencies become fewer.

A local authority commissioned review in March pointed out a number of weaknesses and variations in quality in the teaching then observed by the reviewer. You have some evidence of improvement since then.

In the short visits we made together to lessons, the teaching we saw was generally sharply focused. The expectations of teachers were clear, and reasonably high. Pupils appeared motivated by the tasks set and, despite very hot conditions, concentrated well. The work in their books indicated many have made fair progress over time, which has increased recently. Teachers' marking of their work is thorough and there is clear, recent, evidence of pupils usefully improving their work as a result of it.

The pupils with whom I met explained clearly the value of the marking to them. They described recent improvements in teaching and explained that they often feel well challenged by 'quite hard' work. They were able to give useful examples of how they felt they had made better progress.

The pupils were less convinced about behaviour. While they recognised that the school's new behaviour systems are bringing improvement, they pointed out clearly two things:

- when the normal teacher is not present, and occasionally when they are, behaviour in lessons can deteriorate and it is then hard to concentrate
- there can still be rough and unkind behaviour in the playground, which can be frightening.

The pupils said that staff dealt with these problems, when they are told of them, but wished that they did not exist to begin with.

The school is a better learning environment, which appears well cared for. Displays around the school celebrate pupils' achievements and encourage them to do better. There are effective working walls, which help the pupils' learning across the school. It is good to see evidence of beneficial work by pupils in a range of subjects, including art and history.

We spent some time today discussing your leadership of the school, and why the school has not improved more quickly in the past. You recognise that it should have. You feel that, with advice, you have now changed your style of working so that you are leading the school more visibly. More often, when needed, you are sticking your neck out, to say certain things must happen. Staff, you point out, are responsive to this leadership. The school improvement plan is a useful working document, with some long term objectives, which also show clearer leadership. You have recognised some past mistakes, such as being over optimistic about the performance of the school. Current self-evaluation is much more realistic. Senior and middle leadership has begun to develop well. The leaders with whom I met were clear about their priorities and beginning to identify clearly the impact of their work. It is good to note that all subjects have leaders and that you now meet regularly with all middle

leaders to review their work. Staff, as appropriate, have performance management tasks suitable to their management responsibilities.

It is now essential that you sustain the initiative. The momentum which has begun must continue as new staff come into the school. On this, the learning of the pupils, and the outcome of the next inspection, will depend.

The governing body supports you well and shows strong commitment to the school and its community. Governors ask some robust questions of you. They understand the school, and its performance, in fair detail. Their visits to the school are useful and relate to important improvement areas, such as behaviour. A meeting of governors was recently observed by an independent expert. The recommendations from this review, most notably to sharpen up the way governing body minutes and decisions are recorded and then followed up, are very useful. Governors have rightly begun to implement them.

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 knows the school well and has provided considerable support. For example, the partnership with a local secondary school, brokered by the authority, is most useful. Support has sensibly been reduced to allow you more scope to lead. Nevertheless, the local authority, not unreasonably, still has some concerns about aspects of the progress of the school. However, the pointed way these concerns were minuted after a recent formal meeting has reduced the trust the governing body has in the local authority, which both sides should work to rebuild.

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