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23 June 2014

Mrs Davina Wakelin  
Headteacher  
Meeching Valley Primary School  
Valley Road  
Newhaven  
BN9 9UT

Dear Mrs Wakelin

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Meeching Valley Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 23 March 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 March 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:

- continue to improve teaching by making it more engaging and interesting to the pupils and by expecting pupils to think more for themselves in lessons
- develop the school's curriculum so that it excites and challenges pupils more across all subjects, and is built more on their interests.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other members of your senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.

We visited classrooms together and saw the majority of classes at work, during which I reviewed some of the pupils' books. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school development plan, minutes of the governing body meetings and data about pupils' progress.

## **Main findings**

Your school has responded positively to the recommendations from the previous report. Nevertheless, you face many challenges if the school is to become good.

The successful work that you and other leaders undertook during the period of special measures is clear. Lessons across the school now include more logically sequenced activities. Marking of pupils' work in books is completed more regularly and offers clearer guidance to pupils about how well they have done and what they need to do next. Pupils' writing is valued and displayed throughout the school. The use of role play corners in each classroom is well developed.

You predict better outcomes for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2, where you are expecting results closer to the national average this year. You have correctly identified that there is still much to do to get more pupils to the higher levels. You also expect improved results in Key Stage 1 teacher assessments, although you are right to identify that these are still too low. Pupils who are eligible for support through the additional pupil premium funding are catching up with their peers. The gap between their achievement and other pupils is smaller in some cohorts than in others. You are right to be focused on this and how to make the best use of the extra funding to improve outcomes, building on the work you have done to raise aspirations for all of your pupils.

As we agreed, and saw on our short visits to lessons, teaching needs further improvement. We observed teachers doing too much thinking or problem solving for the pupils and so pupils were sometimes not engaged as well as they could be. When I discussed with pupils how they felt about the school, they said lessons were not always interesting and that school could be 'boring', indicating there is work still to do on the target from the last inspection to ensure learning consistently engages pupils.

Teachers are working harder on their marking, but pupils are not always able to make the most of it. Your school sets time aside very well for pupils to read the marking; however, this would have more value if pupils were expected to follow the advice given by teachers during this time. Your pupils need to learn to work as hard as your teachers. For example, in a lesson in Key Stage 2, the pupils were learning how to calculate the area of an irregular shape. The teacher, through lively and careful explanation, demonstrated how to work out the area of a shape on the whiteboard. But pupils had too few opportunities to work out the way to do it for themselves, limiting their ability to apply the skill in the future.

You are right to focus on improving the curriculum to make pupils as enthusiastic about day-to-day school life as they are about the educational visits they do. Having what you called real or 'concrete' experiences is important for pupils' language development and deepening their learning. I was pleased to hear about the visits to the National History Museum and Tate Gallery in London. Your curriculum now needs to consider the interests of your pupils more fully, for example through the music specialist teaching and or the approach taken by Forest Schools that you have already started. It was good too to see the girls' cricket team enjoying their experience of competition.

You are also clear that there is still work to be done to improve attendance. You have taken strong and appropriate action to challenge those who are reluctant to attend, as well as introducing positive approaches to encourage pupils to come to school. Attendance will need to improve significantly if the school is to get to 'good'.

You and the staff have worked hard to improve pupils' behaviour. The actions you have taken to raise expectations of staff about behaviour, for example the appropriate use of the pastoral room for pupils who need support to behave well, are beginning to make an impact. You and your senior team are rightly reflecting carefully on what is working best so that you are well placed to build on the improvements made. An engaging and rigorous curriculum is likely to help improve both attendance and behaviour, as we discussed.

Your development plan for the school is clear and well set out. It has clear actions for improvement and appropriate measures for when and how progress can be checked. However, it now needs to give more emphasis to the full range of areas requiring improvement, alongside raising standards in English and mathematics. You and your senior staff know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and what needs to be done to help the school get better. You also know how important it will be to redevelop your team of leaders for every subject after recent staff changes.

Your governors have a good understanding of the school and how well it is doing. They give appropriate challenge and support to the school, based on their own high expectations. They understand how to use your plan and information about how well pupils are doing to check the progress of the school. They are also well aware of the challenges you and your staff face in getting the school to 'good'.

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**

You receive effective, regular support from the local authority. The local authority has agreed with us to provide further support on broadening and enriching the curriculum to enhance what had already been organised.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes  
**Seconded Inspector**