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11 July 2014

Mr J Dunn
Headteacher
Herne Bay Junior School
Kings Road
Herne Bay
Kent
CT6 5DA

Dear Mr Dunn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Herne Bay Junior School

Following my visit to your school on Friday 11 July 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:

- make sure all teachers give pupils regular and effective feedback that helps them make better progress in their learning
- focus leaders' efforts to improve teaching on where it remains weaker, particularly in mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, the vice-chair of the governing body, some of your subject leaders and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan, governing body meeting minutes and your governors' plan for

improvement were evaluated. Together we completed short visits to classrooms, during which we looked through pupils' books.

Context

The headteacher is in his last term at the school. A new headteacher will take up post in September. Since the previous inspection the local authority has carried out a review of governance at the school. A new subject leader for English has been appointed from within the staff as part of a wider reorganisation of leadership.

Main findings

You and other leaders have started to tackle the points for improvement that were raised in the previous inspection report. The improvements seen are in their early stages. The school development plan is well organised around the recommendations from the previous inspection. There are clear milestones linked appropriately to your raised expectations for pupils' achievement. Criteria for measuring success are clear and ensure that governors can monitor leaders' work to bring about improvement.

There are signs that teaching is beginning to improve. For example, during our short visits to classrooms we saw teachers making better use of open questions, for example, to encourage pupils to understand what has been inferred within passages of text. Pupils were engaged because they were interested in the text and were challenged by the questions asked. However, there are still inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. For example, as you rightly observed, the texts being used by some teachers were too basic and pupils were not expected to think hard about their meaning. Weaker teaching was characterised by a lack of questioning to stretch or deepen pupils' skills. In these lessons pupils were less engaged and not making the better progress you are looking for.

Teachers are following the new marking policy that has been introduced. The quality of marking in some books shows more improvement than others. Where it is better, pupils are given careful feedback that links to the 'steps for success' for learning. Where it is weaker, the guidance is not precise enough to ensure pupils make the best progress. We saw that pupils do not always respond properly to the feedback they are given, particularly in mathematics.

We saw the impact of your subject leaders' work to improve how more able pupils are stretched. For example in an exciting, investigative Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils were challenged to work out combinations of three legged and seven legged aliens to make different totals. The teacher assessed pupils' progress and stopped them at appropriate times to raise the level of the work. This ensured that pupils, including the more able, had to apply their skills at their own level, which they did

with relish. Leaders need to do more to ensure that stronger practise such as this is shared more readily so improvements in teaching are consistent in all classrooms.

The improvements seen in teaching are beginning to show in the achievement of pupils. The attainment and progress of pupils in reading have improved from the previous year and are now above national averages. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading is also improving. Attainment in writing and mathematics has increased but not as quickly.

The work to improve middle management is having a positive impact. Subject leaders are clearer about what is expected. They are beginning to make better use of opportunities to monitor the initiatives they lead and have shown they are not afraid to change them if they are not working.

Governance is improving. Governors have made good use of support offered by the local authority. They have a better understanding of what data about pupil progress means, and have started to use this to ask more challenging questions of leaders. Their plan for improvement demonstrates how they intend to become more effective in the future. They have an increasingly accurate view of their own strengths and weaknesses, and those of the school.

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 has provided you with effective support. You and other leaders have made good use of this, for example to improve the teaching of reading and in developing your middle leaders. The local authority rightly plans to keep consistent support in place for the school during the time of transition between the current headteacher and the next.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Seconded Inspector