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Clare Escombe
Headteacher
St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School
Royal Rise
Tonbridge
TN9 2DQ

Dear Ms Escombe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, four members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the schools' improvement plans and also scrutinised other documents, including recent records of governors' meetings and school leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning. You and I toured the school and I had lunch with the pupils.

Context

Three teachers joined the school at the beginning of term. The chair of governors and the mathematics and English leaders are all new to those leadership responsibilities.

Main findings

The section 5 inspection report noted that the school has been improving over the past year and the upward journey has continued this term. This is because of your clear sense of purpose and high expectations. It is obvious from your regular checks on teaching and learning that you are focusing on those aspects identified by the section 5 inspection in need of the most improvement, such as making sure the work is hard enough for all pupils, particularly the most able. You place a great deal of emphasis on how well the pupils are learning. You regularly check on the quantity and quality of work in the pupils' books and carry out learning walks around the school every week so that any actions required by the staff are followed up immediately. An emphasis on handwriting this term is evident around the school, and is beginning to show improvements, both in pupils' work and also in the adult writing which is on display.

Other senior and middle leaders are increasingly able to contribute to leadership and management activities. The mathematics and English subject leaders have made an impressive start this term and are already becoming familiar with trends in reading, writing and mathematics skills across the school. They are already providing important support for colleagues and they are working well together and with you to develop their subject and leadership skills.

The governors have struggled in the past to get the right balance between support and challenge but this is improving. They are taking positive steps, such as by undertaking training activities provided by the local authority, to establish appropriate relationships and develop their strategic role. The committee structure offers useful means by which they can regularly evaluate the impact of the school improvement plan. They have also focused on improving home-school communications and are rightly delighted with the success of the 'bedtime story' event which 80 parents attended.

The school's improvement plans are straightforward and sharply focused on the aspects most in need of improvement. Actions are appropriate and training activities are closely linked. Targets for how well pupils should be achieving in reading, writing and mathematics are challenging and set so that progress can be checked at several points during the year. A little more could be done to tease out some of the other aspects, such as behaviour or the teaching of letters and sounds, to be clearer about what success should look like throughout the year.

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

There is good collaboration between you and the local authority improvement advisor and you welcome her support and that of her colleagues. Support is being provided to improve the quality of provision for the youngest children. Subject leaders have benefitted from individual coaching. The local authority is also providing governor training. The school collaborates with other local schools, for example an event is planned with Hugh Christie Technology College to study higher level writing and plan how to help more pupils achieve at this level. You and the chair of governors intend to use your time at an Ofsted Getting to Good seminar to plan in detail some of the next steps in improving the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector