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17 November 2014

Mrs J Cerullo  
Headteacher  
Darenth Community Primary School  
Green Street Green Road  
Dartford  
DA2 8DH

Dear Mrs Cerullo

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Darenth Community Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 2014, 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 third 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school's new systems and ways of working are kept very tightly organised and well evaluated, so that they have maximum impact
- continue to develop middle leadership and improve the rigour and depth of the curriculum.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior and middle leaders, governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan along with other key

documents such as data about pupils' progress and meeting minutes. We toured the school together, visiting all classes at work and looking at samples of pupils' work.

## **Context**

Since the last reported visit, the school has increased its number of classes to seven; one in each year group. A new assistant headteacher has joined.

## **Main findings**

You continue to provide strong, calm, thoughtful, resourceful and dedicated leadership, giving clear direction to the work of the school. As a direct result of the changes you have led, the school is becoming better and better. You think ahead astutely to identify what may need to change or be done, well before time. You have been able to adjust your leadership style in the last year, from one which was understandably directive and 'top down', to one now which includes more fully the opinions and work of others. The school seems happier in its own skin; there is clarity of purpose to which all can contribute something. It was a matter of considerable success, for which you deserve much credit, that the school was able to gain secure funding to operate seven classes from September. This provides a firmer basis for development. You evaluate the school with honesty and rigour, knowing the key strengths and weaknesses well. The assistant headteachers understand their roles well and each can show a valuable contribution.

You have introduced several new and effective ways of working, but which need to be further embedded and sharpened. It is important that you should focus on this, to gain the maximum level of impact. For example, the school improvement plan is well organised and is an effective working document. But some of its objectives are not sharply worded or aspirational enough. For example, the objective of increasing parental engagement (work on which has brought a notable increase in the numbers of parents attending parents' evenings) could aim for all pupils to have a parent or carer actively involved. The school has quite rightly re-adjusted its approach to the teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds). We saw teachers and well-trained teaching assistants teaching this competently. However, not in every case did they check tightly enough that the pupils had learned and memorised the key letter groups. The subject leaders for English and mathematics do very useful and imaginative work in supporting their colleagues and pupils across the school, where they have identified a need for improvement. However, they have yet to ensure that they are always quick enough to evaluate the success or impact of this work. Planning of the lessons we saw in the Reception class, although useful, needed to show more clearly how assessments of the children lead to the activities provided for them.

In the lessons we observed together across the school, we noted that most were well organised and purposeful. Pupils usually engaged willingly. It was good to see, for example, how the increased time available for writing led to many pupils writing at length and with interest. Standards in writing show improvement. We also discussed, however, the importance of ensuring that teachers always make sure that pupils apply the new techniques they learn to their extended writing, so they can make and show most progress.

In the foundation subjects, beyond English and mathematics, we observed pupils doing some interesting work, but the teachers did not routinely show the subject knowledge needed to ensure the pupils' learning and activities were in sufficient depth. This is why the work of all subject leaders needs to be built up. We discussed together that it might be useful for the school's schemes of work (plans of what is taught in each subject and in which year groups) to include more specific activities, as well as objectives.

As a result of all of the improvements, pupils are achieving better, though this is a mixed picture. In the 2014 Key Stage 2 national assessments, pupils' overall attainment met national averages. The measures of how much progress pupils made were very positive. A reasonable number of pupils reached the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics. In Key Stage 1, however, pupils' results were not good enough, meaning there is much work to do to raise standards in the current Year 3 class. Too few pupils reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening, although, in fairness to the school, some pupils who took it had only just joined. It is common for pupils to join and leave the school in all year groups; there is a mobile population. Well-kept school records show that those pupils who remain in the school, and attend well, generally do better than those who do not. The school, however, makes it its principled business to serve the needs of all its pupils, for the long or short term. Pupils entitled to the support of the pupil premium do as well as their peers in many cases but this is a complex picture. Attendance rates are lower amongst the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils than the others (who attend well). The school works hard in its work with families in promoting good attendance.

The governing body, which is full, has sensibly recently re-organised its committee structure. This ensures that it carries out its responsibilities more efficiently. Performance management arrangements are suitable. Governors are strongly committed and ask increasingly searching questions of you and your team, but they and we agreed that sometimes these questions could dig deeper. It is good to see that the Chair of the Governing Body and you have a good and supportive relationship which is, nevertheless, not a cosy one. Governors are rightly pleased with the school, and the way you lead, but not complacent, recognising how much still needs to be done.

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**

Local authority advice to the school is well informed and useful. The local authority recognises rightly the significant improvements made, but also the continuing vulnerability of the school. It is good to see that it makes a range of support readily available, which you use well. This includes recently brokering a supportive link for you with another school's headteacher and providing necessary additional funding.

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**