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Mrs Patricia Hatt
Headteacher
Murston Junior School
Sunny Bank
Sittingbourne
ME10 3QN

Dear Mrs Hatt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Murston Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2015, 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- simplify the improvement plan and sharply focus actions, monitoring and evaluation on those areas identified at the last section 5 inspection as requiring improvement
- ensure that there are clear and regular systems for senior leaders and governors to check whether the actions taken are having the desired impact on pupils' learning and development.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, the vice chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the

last inspection. I had a quick tour of the school with you and had lunch with the pupils. I also looked at a number of documents. These included the school improvement plan, checks on the quality of teaching and learning, records of governing body meetings and records of local authority meetings and visits.

Main findings

There is no doubt that you and the staff are working hard to bring about improvements and there are some aspects where the actions taken are beginning to make a positive difference. For example, the English and mathematics subject leaders are developing their roles and contributing to checks on the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. They are providing training and support for their colleagues and are beginning to note improvements. For example, they say that recent changes to the curriculum mean that learning is more interesting and there is beginning to be a 'buzz' around the school. Their work would be more effective if, each time they carry out monitoring activities, these were clearly linked to specific areas for improvement and then followed up rapidly with support and guidance where necessary.

The pace of improvement is slow because activities such as action planning, monitoring and evaluation are not cohesive nor are they focused specifically on those aspects identified at the last inspection that need to improve. The plan is overly complex and the desired impact not easily measured. You, and other leaders, carry out various checks on the quality of teaching and learning more frequently now. However, these checks are general rather than homing in on the aspects which require the most improvement. This means that when leaders carry out lesson observations, drops-ins and look at pupils' books, the focus and feedback are very wide-ranging and not clear enough about what specific action is needed to bring about improvements. Nor are the checks followed up quickly enough to make sure that teachers act on the advice given to bring about the necessary changes. Monitoring activities tend to focus on what adults are doing rather than on pupils' learning. Senior leaders, including governors, have not clearly identified what success will look like at various points in the year or how they will know whether actions are making enough difference to pupils' learning and development.

Governors make sure that pupils' achievement is the main item on the agenda of their meetings and invite leaders, including subject leaders, to discuss progress in different subjects and for different groups of pupils. However, the records suggest that there is a danger of governors being swamped in the detail of activity rather than taking a more strategic view and asking what difference all the activity being carried out in the school is making. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has been arranged and will happen in March.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. As we discussed, I will

return to the school during the summer term to evaluate progress with senior leaders, including the governing body.

External support

You and your staff are open to advice and support from colleagues in other schools. As a result, inexperienced staff are benefitting from regular support from a specialist leader of education. Your local authority advisor is providing leadership support and brokering visits to other schools so that school staff are able to observe good practice elsewhere in similar types of schools. You have commissioned external consultant support for middle leaders.

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