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Mr Jason Pearn
Headteacher
Milton Court Primary Academy
Brewery Road
Milton Regis
Sittingbourne
ME10 2EE

Dear Mr Pearn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Milton Court Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 1 June 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. 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:

- strengthen school improvement plans to make it clear what will happen, by when, how progress will be checked and impact evaluated
- clarify the responsibilities for leading, monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions in all of the school's plans, including the role of the governing body
- set clear targets for the most able pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from REAch2 Academy Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met the executive

headteacher who is due to take up post from September. You took me on a tour of the school and I visited each class. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans.

Context

You will be leaving the school at the end of August. The current headteacher of your federated partner school will become executive headteacher of both schools. Your deputy headteacher will become acting head of school. The transition to these new leadership arrangements has already begun.

Main findings

You and your leadership team are working diligently and methodically to bring about necessary improvements. You have rightly concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and learning and you acted quickly by issuing clear expectations for all staff and pupils, particularly through 'focus weeks'. These higher expectations are having a positive impact on the behaviour and progress of pupils throughout the school. During my visit to classrooms, the atmosphere was purposeful and pupils were appropriately involved in a range of learning activities. It was clear that pupils knew what was expected of them during the lesson.

Together with leaders from REAch2 Academy Trust, you analysed weaknesses in teaching and this provided a base for an effective staff training programme. Regular training is now in place, in addition to specific support for individual teachers. You have implemented a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. New topics start with an assessment of pupils' starting points in each skill, which teachers use to set tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. Teachers and teaching assistants check how well the pupils are completing the work set and move them onto the next steps as soon as pupils are ready. Work in books and the school's assessment data shows that this is beginning to raise achievement in mathematics. In English, teachers' feedback explains to pupils more precisely how to improve their learning and gives clear targets to help them make faster progress. Pupils were able to show me how they had improved their work using the advice given by their teachers.

You have strengthened the systems used to track pupils' progress. Teachers and leaders regularly assess how well pupils are progressing in reading, writing and mathematics. When pupils are identified as not making enough progress, they are given intensive support which is matched closely to pupils' needs and intended to fill gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The impact of this support programme is checked every three weeks and, where necessary, pupils continue with the additional support until they have caught up. School data shows that most pupils across the school are making faster progress.

You have made a good start on developing the skills of senior and middle leaders. They have benefitted from useful training organised by the REAch2 Academy Trust.

A reorganisation of leadership responsibilities from September is intended to build on the training currently taking place.

You have taken effective steps to tackle some of the priorities for improvement identified by the inspection. However, there is not yet enough focus on raising the achievement of the most able pupils. The school's improvement plans lack clarity and do not show well enough how actions are expected to improve the outcomes for all pupils. The plans include end of year targets for pupils in Years 2 and 6, but they are set too low, particularly for the most able pupils. Plans also require more detail about who will monitor and evaluate the actions undertaken. The governors' role in evaluating the impact of the school improvement plans is not clear enough. Although governors have offered some challenge, the lack of clear timelines and milestone targets makes it difficult for governors to fully hold school leaders to account.

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 school receives effective support from REAch2 Academy Trust. The executive principal and the federation governing body have reorganised leadership responsibilities from September, drawing on strengths from the partner school. Leaders and teachers at Milton Court are developing their skills through leadership training and by working alongside REAch2 representatives in school. You are held to account through regular review of a range of performance indicators, including those related to pupil progress, attendance and the quality of teaching. However, oversight of the progress of improvement plans by Trust leaders has not been thorough enough.

Representatives of the local authority carry out moderation of pupils' work to check that the school's assessments are accurate.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the executive principal of REAch2 Academy Trust.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector