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Dear Mrs Wenban

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Riverview Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2016, 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 June 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics increase.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive headteacher, interim head of school and interim deputy headteacher. I also met with the vice-chair of the governing body and a staff governor, a representative of the local authority and a local leader of education who is supporting the school, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You led me on a tour of the school. I conducted short observations of learning in Years 4 and 5 and I reviewed a wide range of the school's documentation. This included notes of visits from the local authority, governors and other consultants. I reviewed the checks made on adults working or volunteering at the school and the records of accidents, incidents and behaviour.

Context

Since my last visit, you have taken on the role of interim head of school. You have been supported by the appointment of an interim executive headteacher and the local authority has brokered the services of a local leader of education. These two additional leaders are directors of the Pathway Academy MAT (multi-academy trust). Leaders notified me of your intention to retire at the end of April and their search for a suitable replacement. Since my last visit, 21 members of staff have left the school of whom 10 were teachers, some part-time. All have been replaced. There has been a significant change to the governing body. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in the autumn term 2015. He is a national leader of governance and is supported by an experienced vice-chair. There remains one vacancy for a parent governor. The governing body is currently considering a range of options for the future proprietorship of the school.

Main findings

You are to be commended for leading the school through a turbulent period. You have coped with dignity and care with staffing challenges, extensive changes to the governing body and the enduring impact of ineffective historic leadership. At my last visit, you had begun to take action to address some of the legacy issues. You were focusing on the right things but it was too soon to see the impact of your work. Since July 2015, you have been provided with oversight from the interim executive headteacher. With your help and additional capacity provided by the new interim deputy headteacher, the new leadership team is transforming the school quickly.

The school is now making strong progress against the areas which caused it to be judged as requiring improvement at the last inspection. For example, leaders have created a system for checking pupils' progress which is clear and helpful. Staff know now how well each child is doing. The interim executive headteacher discusses pupils' progress with each teacher regularly. This had not happened previously. The system is based on a thorough understanding of what each pupil should know, understand and be able to do at their age. You are changing the school's curriculum to ensure that pupils learn what they need to meet these age expectations.

Leaders have also ensured that a proper and robust system for managing staff performance is in place. All staff now have targets for their performance and know clearly how it will be judged. Leaders have changed this and other aspects of the culture of the school. Teachers now expect to be visited while teaching and to be observed formally. Pupils receive praise when they have done well and are much happier in the school. Pupils were very keen to tell me how much they are now enjoying school, especially all the exciting things they get to learn. Some were particularly thrilled by the chance to get close to snakes and rats, during a Zoolab visit. Others enjoyed learning about birds of prey, including watching the flight of an eagle through the school hall. A few showed me imaginative poetry they had written as part of their polar projects. Overall, pupils were actively engaged in their learning

and contributing enthusiastically to lessons during the inspection.

Teaching has improved considerably since my last visit. Teachers have benefited from the support provided by a wide range of advisers and consultants. Teachers recognise that their practice had not improved much in recent years. This has changed since September 2015. Better use is being made of classrooms and other learning spaces. Teachers and teaching assistants are planning together effectively so that their work is more purposeful. The learning environments are also much improved as teachers make better use of wall displays. There is a good combination of pupils' work and displays which provide support for pupils' learning, such as suggestions for connecting words in sentences or examples of how to use correct punctuation.

Pupils' progress has improved considerably in reading and writing and in the topic work they undertake. There were some lovely examples of work in art, dance and physical education during the visit. Work in books shows accelerating progress across the current year, with standards higher now than in September. Handwriting, for example, is improving steadily in Year 5. This is because a carefully selected group of pupils are receiving direct and skilful support from a teaching assistant.

Improvements to teaching were necessary because some pupils had fallen behind due to weaker teaching in the past. Many had gaps in their knowledge and understanding which came to light once the new system for assessment was in place. This is especially true in mathematics. Last year, pupils achieved lower standards in Year 6 in this subject than in reading and writing. There was a wide gap between the outcomes in mathematics for disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. In 2015, the standards attained declined even further than in 2014, so that little value was added to the Year 6's learning in mathematics since their time in Year 2. Many pupils were observed lacking confidence in handling numbers and basic calculation methods. Leaders are aware that this is a priority for immediate improvement.

The school's work to keep the pupils safe is effective. This additional monitoring visit was commissioned as a response to some safeguarding concerns. You provided me with plenty of evidence that the pupils are safe in the school and that you take very seriously any matter which might put them at risk. You explained carefully how you keep pupils safe at play and lunchtime. The playgrounds and dining hall are supervised extremely well. Outside, pupils run around safely and carefully if they wish to, or sit quietly playing or chatting with their friends. A few pupils act as 'peer mediators' and help to sort out any minor disagreements. The interim executive headteacher outlined her plans for radically improving the outside spaces so that pupils have even better recreation activities and equipment.

Pupils behave well generally. Sometimes, however, they fall short of the high expectations all adults have of them. When they do, you create, and then keep, impressive records of the incidents so that everybody knows what has happened. Over time, the school is developing a much more pleasant and nurturing atmosphere. Pupils cooperate well with each other and adults.

The new leadership team has put in place a series of development plans to address the school's weaknesses. The plans are sharply focused and address adequately the areas for improvement indicated at the last inspection. In addition, the governing body has been reconstituted so that it contains personnel with the necessary skills to oversee the school's development and to hold the leadership team to account. Governors are now making purposeful visits to the school on a regular basis to check on its work. Governors are rightly concerned that the pupil premium (additional funding from the government for pupils eligible for free school meals or those looked after by the local authority) was not used properly in the past. They have added the role of pupil premium champion to the interim deputy headteacher's areas of responsibility. This means there is now a clear line of accountability for this work. Governors intend this to lead to better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

External support

Since my last visit, the school has been much more willing to accept external support. The local authority has strengthened its work with the school through the appointment of a new school improvement adviser. Since January 2016, he has developed a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He is also providing effective support for improvements to teaching by undertaking focused observations of learning. The interim executive headteacher is involved in direct school improvement work for two and a half days a week. She works closely with the local leader of education, who either provides direct training or support herself or shares expertise from her own base school with the team at Riverview. This has meant that teachers have been able to check the quality and standards of pupils' work with other teachers. They have also been able to gather new ideas and resources to refresh their practice.

The local authority and the wider leadership team have secured the services of additional external consultants who have conducted leadership reviews and evaluated accurately other aspects of the school's work. There are many signs that this work is contributing well to the progress of the school. All supporters are committed to making Riverview Juniors the best it can be as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dr Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector