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Mrs Tracey Boanas
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Boanas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dunton Green Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 2017, 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016, 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- sharpen the school improvement plan to set out clearly the remaining action that leaders need to take to get the school to good and include detail of precisely how they will measure that improvements are on track
- complete work already begun to make it easier to track the progress of different groups of pupils from their varying starting points to ensure that all achieve well enough.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the two acting headteachers and consultant headteacher who, until very recently, led the school. I met with other school leaders and a group of governors, and spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. You joined me as I made brief visits to all classes to observe during lessons. During this tour, I also took the opportunity to speak with a variety of pupils and review the work in their books and on display. I spoke informally with a small number of parents at the start of the school day. You provided me with a range of documentation to support our discussions about the actions taken since the last inspection, which I reviewed.

Context

There have been a considerable number of significant changes at headteacher and governing body level since the previous inspection. The former headteacher left at the end of the autumn term. The local authority brokered a partnership with a local outstanding primary school to provide interim leadership. Ultimately, this comprised two acting headteachers drawn from current and former leaders of the partner school, overseen by its headteacher, who is a national leader of education. You started as the new substantive headteacher four days before this monitoring inspection. There has also been a significant change in membership of the governing body, including three different chairs of the governing body since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Supported well by the local authority, leaders and governors have ensured that the school has not floundered in a turbulent period since the previous inspection. Repeated changes of senior leadership have meant that over time the school has not improved as quickly as it might have done. However, a sharper focus and a clearer sense of direction since January have put the school on the right track towards providing a good standard of education. Critical in this recent success has been the interim partnership with a local outstanding school's national leader of education and other leaders, brokered by the local authority. However, governance and subject leadership within school are also strengthening.

Your arrival, less than a week before my visit, has been welcomed at all levels. You have already created a good impression among staff and parents. You have swiftly and accurately identified strengths and weaknesses. Like governors, you are realistic about the challenges the school still faces but, drawing on your previous experience, you are determined that you can and will succeed. Both you and governors described the rigour and thoroughness of your selection and recruitment process. In the face of the vulnerability of the school's position without a permanent headteacher, governors showed courage and strong strategic leadership when making this critical appointment. Leaders hope that an extended period of transition

with the previous acting headteachers, facilitated by the local authority, will help to minimise disruption and maximise continuity.

Since January, interim leaders have focused strongly on improving teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics. They consider carefully how well different groups of pupils in each class are doing when setting improvement targets for teachers. These identified development needs link well with training opportunities for teachers, including working with teachers from the outstanding partner school. Teachers value these opportunities and, though the formal partnership has ended, you plan to continue these links. With a close eye on making sure that all improvements are sustainable, interim leaders have increased the involvement of the school's own leaders in securing changes. English and mathematics leaders check that newly introduced strategies are followed consistently and for the most part they are. However, the quality of teaching continues to be variable.

We agreed that the strongest evidence of improvement in teaching, learning and assessment is in key stage 2. Teachers ask challenging questions and show awareness of pupils' differing abilities when planning tasks for them to tackle. They check pupils' understanding regularly and look for ways to deepen their understanding as a result. However, sometimes teachers do not probe deeply enough to check pupils' understanding properly, particularly in key stage 1. Consequently, tasks do not consistently match pupils' needs well enough to promote quicker progress, particularly for the least and most able. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their resulting focus and concentration are much improved, especially in key stage 2. Work on display is presented to a high standard. Work in pupils' books shows increasing care over time and, although within a variable quality of presentation overall, some pupils have mastered exceptionally neat and fluent writing styles.

It has taken a long time to establish accurate and reliable information about how well pupils are doing. Following intensive work by interim leaders, other leaders and staff, there is a shared confidence that accurate assessments of pupils' capabilities are now in place. This information is being used well by teachers and leaders to plug gaps in pupils' learning. However, some pupils still have some way to go to achieve as well as other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Leaders' strategic use of this information to show clearly how much progress particular groups, such as disadvantaged pupils or the most able, have made from their differing starting points is still a work in progress. Without this, it is difficult to establish whether differences in outcomes compared with other pupils nationally are closing quickly enough.

Leaders' concerns about the reliability of previous assessments are likely to be an issue for some time, particularly where these are used as a starting point to compare pupils' subsequent progress. Year 6 and early years teachers' assessments have been checked and confirmed as accurate by the local authority this year.

Teachers' assessments show that Year 6 pupils' attainment is higher than that of their predecessors, despite their key stage 2 starting points being slightly lower. Results of the Year 1 phonics screening check are also likely to rise this year.

As the new headteacher, you recognise how the school improvement plan can be improved and understand the importance of this urgent task. Partly due to temporary and interim leadership arrangements, the current plan is too limited in focus and timeframes, so does not provide a clear pathway of all that is required to get the school to good. It lacks precise measures for leaders and governors to check that their actions are securing the necessary improvement quickly enough.

External support

Local authority support has been instrumental in strengthening the capacity of leaders to improve, both through brokering interim arrangements and supporting sustainable developments at middle leadership and governance levels. The partnership with the local outstanding school has been pivotal in galvanising the staff, getting the school back on the right track and accelerating the pace of improvement.

Following a wide-ranging external review of governance, governors ask more pertinent and appropriately challenging questions of school leaders about the school's effectiveness. Leaders now also share with governors more useful information in a timely manner. As a result, governors are proactive in seeking clarification or requesting even greater detail, for example, about the performance of particular groups of pupils.

The external review of pupil premium funding resulted in improvements to the current year's plan. For example, it shows clearer identification of barriers for disadvantaged pupils and the strategy employed to lift their achievement as a result. However, current measures still show wide differences in the outcomes for these pupils compared with other pupils nationally, and there is not enough focus on the most able disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector