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Dear Mrs Phillips

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Kingsdown Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils' achievements in phonics and reading, particularly in key stage 1, improve further.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior and middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and two additional governors. I also held telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority, and of the diocese, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited classrooms in all key stages, jointly with senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning. In addition, I also met with a group of pupils. Finally, I reviewed work in pupils' exercise books from across the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new early years leader, two part-time teachers and a newly qualified teacher have taken up post.

Main findings

After the previous inspection, leaders took appropriate time to reflect on its disappointing outcome. In doing so, they deepened their understanding of what the school needed to do better, and of how to sustain what was going well. Subsequently, leaders' self-evaluation of the schools' effectiveness is more accurate, and their carefully considered action plan is enabling them to tackle with growing success the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. All leaders demonstrate a firm commitment to improving standards of education at West Kingsdown and a determination for all pupils to achieve highly.

Throughout the school, expectations of what pupils can and should achieve have been raised. For instance, in the early years, pupils are encouraged effectively to remain focused while practising their writing. This was seen in one session where the teaching assistant challenged them with probing questions, and ensured that they finished an appropriate amount of work before moving on to another activity. Higher expectations are ensuring that pupils are increasingly likely to persevere when they find learning challenging.

Pupils are achieving more strongly. This is because teachers plan learning with greater care to meet pupils' needs. For instance, most-able pupils are being challenged more consistently, particularly in English and mathematics. As a result, learning more frequently engages pupils' interests and inspires them to work harder. However, leaders are rightly focusing on improving pupils' reading and phonics skills, particularly in key stage 1 where attainment is still too low.

Leaders use assessment information with increasing accuracy to check pupils' achievement. They now closely scrutinise different groups of learners, such as the most able and those who are disadvantaged, to make sure they make good progress. Leaders are much quicker to identify pupils who fall behind, and to put in place effective additional support.

Leaders have ensured that the school's marking and feedback policy is being used more consistently throughout the school. Work in exercise books shows that pupils respond well to this feedback and use it to improve their work more successfully.

Leaders' checks on teaching and learning are becoming rigorous. Importantly, teachers are being held to account more stringently through raised expectations and better appraisal. Teachers report that better training opportunities are helping them improve their own practice. As a result, standards in teaching are rising.

Leaders' reviews of incidents of poor behaviour have improved. Rightly, leaders now monitor this information closely and can demonstrate that over time behaviour is getting better. This is because pupils are rising to the higher expectations staff have of them, and leaders are working more diligently with pupils and their families to tackle unacceptable behaviour. Similarly, leaders remain committed to improving rates of attendance, particularly for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, which, despite recent improvements last year, are still too low.

A review of governance has taken place. Using this, governors have taken incisive action to improve their own ability to hold leaders rigorously to account. A useful restructuring of the governing body has increased governors' effectiveness in monitoring, for example, the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Governors use a range of progress information more accurately to better challenge leaders' progress against the school action plan. Governors' improved effectiveness now contributes well to the overall effectiveness of leadership and management at West Kingsdown.

The school's use of the pupil premium grant has been reviewed. Leaders now monitor more closely the achievement of this group of pupils and are quicker to provide additional support precisely when needed.

External support

The local authority is now successfully supporting the school's ongoing improvement. For instance, it has been instrumental in forging effective partnerships with other good schools in the area. These have provided effective opportunities for leaders and teachers to strengthen their own skills, develop their professional knowledge and, where appropriate, share their own growing good practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Dom Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector