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Iain Rudgyard
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Dear Iain Rudgyard

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Dymchurch Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 November 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the trust board and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I looked at the school's development plans. I also carried out visits to lessons, listened to some pupils read, held meetings with other staff, and talked to pupils. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

Main findings

Since the last inspection there has been a change in some key leadership roles, including your appointment as headteacher. The school has also established its own governing body, known as the 'local monitoring council'.

Your focus on the curriculum has already ensured that there are now appropriate sequences of learning in place across each subject area. These have been the result of careful work to identify the key knowledge and skills that all pupils need to know. They are planned from the early years upwards. These plans are now becoming more embedded, but there are some subjects that are further along in this journey than others. You have rightly prioritised the core areas of early reading and mathematics, although recognise that there is more work to do to embed the curriculum plans in the wider foundation subjects.

There have also been effective curriculum plans put in place for the early years. These are also well considered in terms of how they will prepare children for their learning as they move to Year 1. Key vocabulary for each unit has been identified, however, in the classroom there is still a need to maximise the opportunities for staff to model talk and communication with children.

The teaching of phonics is now broadly effective. You have ensured that staff have been trained to deliver the new phonics programme. Wider support from the local English subject hub, as well as the trust, has helped to develop this practice. The school monitors this work, and this close scrutiny is helping to improve where there still need to be refinements. For example, there is recognition that the phonics lessons could provide greater support, so that pupils recognise sounds with increasing fluency. There is also a need to ensure that misconceptions are picked up by staff consistently when pupils read to them. This will allow staff to correct pupils when mistakes are made and so further develop pupils' accuracy and confidence.

In lessons, there are strong relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, and they are keen to engage. Staff show generally secure subject knowledge in their explanations. There are some effective ways in which misconceptions are being picked up by staff, but this is not always consistent. Leaders acknowledge the need for there to be more support for staff to ensure that questioning is used precisely, so that teachers can gauge what pupils have understood and, importantly, adapt their input in lessons to ensure that misconceptions do not persist.

There is now greater stability in the senior leadership team with the appointment of yourself as headteacher, as well as a new special educational needs coordinator from September 2022. Your work as leaders is already having evident impact on the school's progress on the areas identified in the last inspection, as well as engaging with the parents and carers in the school community. There has been effective support from the trust, including support for strategic planning, and sharing effective practice between trust schools. Middle leaders have started to be supported in terms of their leadership of key

subjects, and this is helping curriculum improvement. However, there is still further work to do in this area, particularly supporting leaders at all levels in establishing the mechanisms to assure themselves that subjects are being delivered as effectively as they intend.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Our Community Multi Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Marian Feeley
His Majesty's Inspector