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Mrs Jan Parsons
Headteacher
Willesborough Infant School
Church Road
Willesborough
Ashford
Kent
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Dear Mrs Parsons

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Willesborough Infant School, Kent Local Authority

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, and representatives of the governing body and of the local authority. I evaluated the school improvement and action plans, teachers' lesson plans, governing body minutes and records of school lesson observations. We made some short visits to lessons together.

Main findings

Together with your senior leaders and governors, you are working usefully with the local authority and have written an appropriate, concise, working plan to address the main recommendations from the inspection. Additionally, and rightly, you are also planning to develop other aspects of the school.

As part of this planning, you have decided sensibly to bring back whole-school subject leaders for English and mathematics. The period without such leaders has coincided with a decline in pupils' attainment in these subjects. Under the current system, with year group leaders taking most of the responsibility for subjects, it is hard for staff to be sure that their expectations of all pupils are high enough and sufficiently connected to the expectations in other year groups. There are also no leaders for subjects beyond English and mathematics, and this too needs to be addressed.

Teachers' lesson plans in English and mathematics show a suitable breadth of planned work. Teachers arrange different work for different groups of pupils, depending on their needs. However, this work is not sharply enough planned to meet the specific learning steps each pupil needs to take in order to reach the next level. Nor is it always demanding enough. You are aware that teachers' expectations of pupils need to increase further. For this reason, you re-introduced setting in English and mathematics in Key Stage 1, during this school year. Pupils' attainment has risen in 2013 in reading, writing and mathematics, though it is still lower than it was a few years ago. In particular, too few pupils reach the higher Level 3, showing further the importance of raising teachers' expectations.

Lessons are regularly observed by senior leaders, who offer feedback to each teacher on what is going well in their lessons and what can be improved. Teachers are reflective when they comment on these observations, and helpfully join in the dialogue with senior staff. Useful coaching and support is offered to teachers. You can point, correctly, to evidence of teaching which is improving. However, senior leaders do not check clearly that their improvement recommendations are directly followed up by teachers, by the next observation. So some momentum and focus is lost.

The deputy headteacher, as assessment leader, has made sensible choices about how to dovetail assessments from the Early Years Foundation Stage with those from Key Stage 1. This should avoid teaching time being wasted at the start of Year 1. You target pupil premium funding carefully. However, the school's data indicates that, despite some successes, its impact so far is mixed. Rightly, you intend to continue with the strategies that have been most fruitful in closing the attainment gap between those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding and the others.

The governing body continues to improve its work. Its members properly insist that they receive reports in formats which are most useful to them. In recent meetings, their questioning of senior school leaders has been exceptionally sharp and has helped to refine the school's work. For example, a very good question about pupils who could potentially attain at the higher levels led you to consider how to use Key Stage 2 teaching objectives, thus raising expectations of the pupils. However, governors do not have a role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school improvement plan. Doing so could help them to understand better how well the school is doing, using first-hand information.

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:

- ensure that senior leaders check specifically that recommendations and targets agreed with teachers after lesson observations have been worked on and implemented by the time of the next observation
- involve governors directly in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's improvement planning
- ensure that senior and middle leaders take whole school responsibilities, not just responsibilities in an individual year group, to help raise expectations of pupils
- restore whole-school leadership for each subject.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority adviser, attached to the school since the inspection, shows an astute awareness of the issues facing the school, and how they may be best addressed. He has won the respect of senior staff. He provided useful guidance for the drawing up of the recent action plan. Local authority consultant support for teachers is suitably targeted.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector