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18 July 2013

Mrs Cathy Walker  
Executive headteacher  
Lower Halstow Primary School  
School Lane  
Lower Halstow  
Sittingbourne  
Kent  
ME9 7ES

Dear Mrs Walker

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lower Halstow Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

#### **Evidence**

During the visit I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, governors and a local authority representative to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited each classroom with you and the head of school to see the school in action and looked in pupils' books. I evaluated the school action plan.

#### **Context**

Since the inspection one new member of staff has been appointed and has recently started at the school to fill a vacancy being covered by the Head of School.

## **Main findings**

You and your senior colleagues are ensuring that morale is good amongst staff and there is a shared determination to make improvements so the school is judged to be 'good'.

Your draft action plan focuses on the right areas of the school's work and includes more challenging goals for pupils' attainment than previously. Key staff such as subject leaders are developing a better understanding of the aspects of their subjects requiring improvement so they will be able to include this in action planning. However the organisation of the plan is muddled. It is not always clear enough what actions are required to reach the intended goals and how progress towards the goals will be checked, or who by. Teaching is rightly a strong focus within the plan but there is a lack of clarity over which areas of teaching are the most important. The school needs to establish a picture of what it means by 'good teaching' and should exploit links across federated and alliance schools in order to support this and help staff understand the features of good teaching.

Since the Section 5 inspection you and other leaders have taken some effective action to improve the school. Teachers have worked well as a team to check their judgements of the levels pupils are working at and as a result are now more confident that their assessments are accurate. For example, they have worked more closely with subject leaders for English and mathematics to check the level of pupils' work. As a result they are better placed to plan lessons which are appropriately challenging for all pupils. You are suitably refining how extra support for pupils who fall behind is organised and evaluated so that it is effective in raising standards. You correctly identify that the need for such additional provision will lessen as better quality day to day teaching means that fewer pupils fall behind.

An external review of governance was not required after the last inspection. The governing body also covers the partner school. The federation was agreed before the section 5 inspection, bringing the governing bodies together. The governors are securing appropriate support from the local authority to ensure they are able to monitor both schools effectively. Governors understand the need to measure pupils' progress not just their attainment. They are aware of the need to check that teaching is improving, but because of weaknesses in your action plan it is not clear enough which aspects of teaching you are working on and how governors will check. Governors receive a breakdown of senior leaders' observations of teaching, however these too need sharpening so they can check if teaching is getting better. Currently, senior leaders' observations focus too little on the most important aspects of teaching and are too generalised to give teachers clear guidance on how to improve.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. To accelerate progress further you need to take the steps below.

- Improve the action plan so that:
  - it is always clear what actions are necessary in order to bring about the desired changes
  - progress towards goals can be easily checked
  - it is clear which aspects of teaching the school is trying to improve.
- Leaders' feedback to teachers after observations of teaching should focus more closely on the most important aspects of teaching.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has recognised the school needs more support than it was receiving before the last inspection. Subsequent visits by local authority personnel have been more regular but further support needs to be targeted closely at the school's identified priorities for improving teaching. The local authority is aware that their support for governors will need to ensure they are able to monitor and support the two schools in the federation effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**