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Mrs F Rusbridge
Headteacher
Willesborough Infant School
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Dear Mrs Rusbridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willesborough Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 7 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 second 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.

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:

- improve the teaching and outcomes for pupils in writing
- continue to develop the roles of subject leaders in all subjects, so that the curriculum becomes broader and more challenging for pupils
- ensure that key school management systems, such as staff performance management, are even more sharply constructed.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders. Together, we toured the school, visiting all classes and looking at examples of pupils' work. I also met with members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the

local authority. I evaluated documents, including governing body minutes, data showing the progress made by pupils, local authority reports and school plans.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, you have taken over as headteacher.

Main findings

The school is improving well. You have shown strong and caring leadership, achieving a great deal in a short time. You have won the confidence and commitment of staff. One teacher, speaking for others, said, 'It's exhausting but exciting.' In other words, you rightly have high expectations of staff but also are enthusing and empowering them in their work. Another said that while it is necessary for you to say that things can be better, it is also good to be shown how to improve and be given direct help. Teamwork is growing. The building work planned for the summer is designed to make this easier by relocating teaching spaces and the staffroom. Your overall decision to focus on developing and supporting people, rather than just improving school systems, has been exactly right and very successful.

However, we discussed together the importance of making sure that management systems such as staff performance management, teachers' lesson planning and school improvement planning are all made more tight, clear and better dovetailed together. At the moment, these systems are all fit for purpose but sometimes their contents lack sharpness and precision. You are aware of this. It is important to show how they fit together coherently.

You evaluate the school accurately. You have clear evidence that teaching has improved over the year. You have identified precisely what is working well in lessons and what still needs to be improved. Staff have benefited from, and speak very positively of, the training and support they have received. When we visited lessons, we saw, in all classes, pupils engaged in purposeful activity. In the Reception classes, it was good to see children enjoying a variety of worthwhile 'hands on' pursuits, including creating number sentences and 'planting' carrots in the earth. We agreed that the sophistication of planning for these activities needed to be developed further, so that we could be sure that the activities were well linked to assessments and sufficiently challenging for the children. In Years 1 and 2 we saw effective teaching of mathematics and English. Planning for these lessons was well structured.

Year 1 pupils are about to go on a school visit. We agreed that more might be made of this visit, beyond what is planned, to support the pupils' writing. This is important as the pupils' assessment data shows. Overall, there is considerable improvement this year, particularly in reading and mathematics. More pupils have reached the higher level 3, especially in reading. Pupils' writing has also improved, but at a much lesser rate. It is therefore, very important that writing should be a high priority in the

next academic year. Having an increasingly engaging and exciting curriculum across all subjects should help with this, as we discussed. The Year 1 phonics (linking letters and sounds) screening results also show improvement from last year. It was good to note that most Year 2 pupils who retook the test from last year reached the expected standard. Nevertheless, you rightly want these scores to be higher, and note how this should help improve pupils' writing. You are sensibly reconsidering how to organise the phonics lessons, including how pupils learn to blend together and segment letter sounds and how teaching can be made more challenging for all.

In the Reception classes, pupils' attainment shows improvement from that of the cohort last year, but not as much as you or I would like. Although teaching has improved in these classes, there is more to do yet, as we discussed. There is a wider gap between the attainment of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding in Reception, than there is by Year 2. It is important that this gap should close through improved teaching. The same applies to pupils who speak English as an additional language. Rightly, you have started to increase the engagement between families whose main language is not English and the school, before the children start.

You have worked effectively to develop the work of middle leaders. It was very good to hear about, and see evidence of, the way subject leaders have begun to have some impact. They are working hard and enjoying the increased responsibility. You have further plans to develop and consolidate this next year as new staff, who you have appointed with great care, join. The work of year group leaders and the English and mathematics leaders is better developed at this stage than that in other subjects. However, you are aware that improving the capacity of leadership at all levels remains a key priority. Much depends on you at the moment. As time goes on, the aim should be for more accountability to be devolved to others.

The governing body has continued to develop its work and is suitably organised. Its members know the school well and have clear expectations. They appear to have taken some useful training in the last year. It is good to hear how governors have been supportive of the increasing role of parents in the school. Governors ask increasingly challenging questions of you and senior staff. Their visits to the school are appropriately focused. I was pleased to see the improved system they are developing, with local authority support, for recording and sharing the main outcomes of their visits.

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

You are very complementary about the support and advice you receive from the local authority's key adviser in the school. It is also clear that the local authority has assessed the progress of the school accurately and rigorously. As a director yourself, you have used well support provided by the local Ashford teaching school alliance,

with local authority backing. The school is increasingly part of a number of useful networks.

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