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14 September 2013

Mrs A Rogers
Headteacher
Plumpton Primary School
Southdowns
Plumpton Green
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East Sussex
BN7 3EB

Dear Mrs Rogers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Plumpton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 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.

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:

- long-term plans for the substantive leadership and management of the school are clear and practical and are communicated promptly and effectively to parents and carers and to the wider community
- roles and responsibilities are well-defined and sustainable
- curriculum planning meets the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able and those in the second year of a two-year class
- subject leaders are helped to develop and monitor teaching and learning in their curriculum area

- the school's action plan is regularly updated to show progress being made on key issues and, briefly, the impact of actions taken.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings to discuss action taken since the last inspection were held with you, the Local Leader of Education, the partner headteacher supporting your school for two and a half days a week, the Chair of Governors and two other governors, a representative of the local authority's school improvement service, the seconded deputy head and the literacy leader. I also met a group of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils. The school's action plan was evaluated and responses on the Parent View website reviewed. With you, I toured the school and visited all classrooms. I attended the school's 'celebration' assembly.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have returned after a long period of absence and a deputy headteacher has been seconded to the school, until December 2013 in the first instance. She has also taken on responsibilities as special needs coordinator and mathematics subject leader. The Local Leader of Education has stepped back from her executive headteacher role, while continuing to support the school, and the headteacher of a neighbouring school has taken up a partnership role, spending 50% of his time at Plumpton Primary. Two teachers have been replaced. New safety and behaviour policies and procedures have been established. Teachers and teaching assistants have undergone phonics training.

Main findings

The school's improvement plan is well-structured, setting out the actions to be taken in response to each of the issues raised at the last inspection and identifying those responsible for leading each initiative, monitoring its implementation and evaluating its impact within a manageable timeframe. The plan, however, places an unsustainable breadth and weight of responsibility on the seconded deputy headteacher and does not include subject leaders in planning and monitoring teaching and learning. There is no area within the plan for progress against the targets to be recorded and for the impact of specific actions to be briefly outlined as the basis for the next planning cycle.

Following the Chair of Governor's request for a local authority review of provision just before the last inspection, prompt action was taken to strengthen the school's behaviour and safety policies and procedures. Well-targeted interventions and rigorous monitoring have eliminated inadequate teaching, with improvements remarked on by pupils. Prompt and effective action has also been taken to strengthen the school's leadership and management, although long-term,

substantive arrangements are yet to be decided. Governors are better informed about their statutory responsibilities and about the part they should play in driving improvement. A review of teaching and learning will be the major item at all meetings, with governors' ability to provide challenge enhanced through training later this year.

Governors, as well as the local authority and the school's leaders, recognise the urgency with which relationships with parents and carers need to be improved, as responses on the Parent View at the time of this visit demonstrate. Although changing perceptions takes time, the combined expertise and commitment of the Local Leader of Education, partner headteacher and seconded deputy headteacher are beginning to rebuild parents' and carers' confidence in the school and to establish more positive and productive attitudes to teaching and learning. A Year 5 pupil clearly spoke for others in saying, 'Now I can already feel I am learning much better.' However, the pupils interviewed were definite that challenge came less from teachers than from more able pupils in the same class and that progress slowed in the second year of a two-year class. The local authority and those currently leading and managing the school recognise the need to provide more challenge if pupils are to attain above average levels by the end of Key Stage 2. The school's most conspicuous strength is in the Reception class. Here the environment is stimulating and pupils clearly enjoy and benefit from opportunities to be independent and creative learners, showing curiosity and initiative as well as the ability to work collaboratively.

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

External support

The local authority is making a substantial and effective contribution to the school's improvement. Having identified significant weaknesses, it has contributed to strategic planning, organised and largely funded immediate and productive support for leadership and management, and provided consultancy and training for governors and for staff. The school also benefits from participation in the local cluster group of schools, drawing on the experience and good practice of others.

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

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector