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Ms Emma Hickling
Ulcombe Church of England Primary School
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Dear Ms Hickling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 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:

- simplify and sharpen the success criteria in the post Ofsted recovery plan so that successful impact is more easily identified and measured.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, two governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone discussion with a representative of the diocese. I evaluated a number of key documents such as the school's post Ofsted recovery plan, subject action plans, attendance information and up-to-date pupil achievement data. I looked at records

of the six weekly progress meetings, outcomes of your weekly monitoring of teaching and learning and information about the review of governance. I also accompanied you on a tour of the school.

Context

Since December the number of the pupils attending the school has risen from 45 to 60. The school has entered into a formal collaboration with two other schools and you are the senior leader in all three. There have been changes to the roles and responsibilities of the governing body including a new, experienced, chair of governors. A teaching assistant from one of the other schools is working part time in this school to strengthen the quality of classroom support.

Main findings

The inspection in December noted that, although you had only been in the school for a few weeks, you were already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' progress. This has continued and the pace of improvement has speeded up. You identified the areas requiring improvement and rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. You are now beginning to develop the leadership roles and skills of the teaching staff.

Close coaching, mentoring and specific individual targets are helping teachers to improve. They now have a much better understanding of how well pupils are achieving, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are better informed about how well pupils should be achieving and their expectations are rising. This is supported by sharing pupils' work from one of the partnership schools to help teachers gain a better understanding of what learning at different levels of achievement looks like and to ensure that their judgements are accurate. Each week you check on the quality and impact of teaching by looking at teachers' lesson planning, pupils' books, and spending time in lessons. This rigorous, supportive monitoring and the termly assessments of how well pupils are achieving, gives a clear picture of improvement.

Pupils are now making much more rapid progress, particularly in mathematics and reading. You discovered that the assessments of writing had been inaccurate and that teachers thought the pupils were doing better than was actually the case. This has now been addressed so that assessments are accurate, but it means that writing is the aspect where progress has been slowest. Many of the pupils, particularly the older children, are making accelerated progress and are making up the ground lost by previously poor teaching. Now that most pupils are making at least the expected rate of progress, the school is able to identify individual pupils who are not yet achieving well and there are specific, closely targeted actions taken to match their particular needs.

For some pupils this means a much greater focus on working with their families to improve their attendance. You and the senior teacher, working in partnership with the education welfare officer, have successfully reduced, by more than half, the number of pupils who take a lot of time off school. In some cases the improvements have been very noticeable. Although overall attendance is still below average, it is much better than before.

The local authority carried out a review of governance following the inspection and the governing body is beginning to address the weaknesses. Some governors have undergone training on roles, responsibilities and the interpretation of data. They are involved in evaluating the impact of the recovery plan. The benchmarks, milestones and overarching targets make this straightforward but the success criteria in the plan are not always helpful in identifying what impact governors should expect to see as a result of some of the actions.

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 brokered your leadership of the school and, in partnership with you, the governing bodies and the diocese, has agreed a formal collaboration which involves three schools. This is stabilising and strengthening the viability of this school. Plans are underway to appoint two new senior leaders and further strengthen leadership across the three schools. The local authority carried out the review of governance and continues to provide support and challenge, particularly through the regular progress meetings. Teachers and teaching assistants are also benefitting from working with colleagues from one of the three schools. This includes giving staff the opportunity to learn from, and share, good practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald

Her Majesty's Inspector