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4 May 2018

Mrs Sheila Todd  
Headteacher  
Northdown Primary School  
Tenterden Way  
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Kent  
CT9 3RE

Dear Mrs Todd

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Northdown Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection 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 November 2017. 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, the regional executive director of The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), the chair of governors, senior and middle leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and staff responsible for attendance. All of these meetings were to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Together, you and I visited classrooms to observe learning. I spoke to pupils in lessons, looked at work in pupils' books and met with a group of pupils. I examined a range of documentation provided by leaders, including information regarding pupils' progress and attendance, the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management. I evaluated leaders' plans to improve the school.

## **Context**

One teacher has joined the school since the section 5 inspection. Two classes have long-term cover arrangements in place until the end of this academic year. Fifty pupils have left the school, 32 have joined. Three new governors have been appointed to the school governing committee to replace others who left. A staff governor has also been appointed. Elections are planned later this term to fill the two vacant parent governor positions.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection you have successfully created a promising team of senior and middle leaders. Leaders at all levels share your ambitious determination to improve the school. Developments rightly have pupils at the heart and are keenly focused on improving their outcomes. You have established an appropriate sense of urgency to this work and there are positive signs of improvement emerging.

The high-quality staff training and support you provide, together with increasingly rigorous performance management procedures, are contributing well to improvements in teaching. Your clearly stated expectations for the quality of teaching you expect to see are helping to create greater consistency in teaching and learning across the school.

You are ensuring that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is a shared priority across your wider leadership team. Leaders understand what is preventing pupils from learning well and use this knowledge effectively to improve teaching. Pupils talked to me enthusiastically about their learning and the progress they are making. They could clearly explain how teachers now help them. Work seen in pupils' books and the school's own information about disadvantaged pupils' progress show that many are starting to catch up with other pupils nationally, particularly in reading and writing. However, these encouraging rates of progress are not yet consistent across all subjects or in all year groups. Leaders are aware of this and know this is an area where there is more work to do, particularly in mathematics.

Leaders are taking effective action to begin improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Staff are now working more closely with families to encourage pupils to attend school regularly. Signs of the positive impact of this work can particularly be seen in the reduction in persistent absence rates emerging for this academic year. You have sensible plans to further strengthen this work.

At the time of the previous inspection, work had just begun to identify the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities accurately. This work has successfully continued and careful assessment means that pupils' learning needs are now better understood. For example, the Mulberry Bush class is providing effective support to a small group of pupils with significant needs. Progress for these

pupils from their individual starting points is very closely monitored and support skilfully adapted when needed. Many of the pupils receiving this high level of well-tailored support are starting to make faster progress than in the past. You have promising plans to introduce the same level of rigour to the wider group of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities across the school, so that support is accurately matched to pupils' needs, but these are yet to be implemented. The quality of additional adult support has also been an area of development. When this works well, adult support is sharply focused on supporting pupils' learning. However, leaders know that this approach must be made more consistent across the whole school.

Governance arrangements have been successfully strengthened since the last inspection. The school governing committee has an improving focus on strengthening the school's effectiveness. Governors have been recruited with relevant skills to provide support and challenge to school leaders. There are clear links between the joint governing board and the central TKAT board. Helpfully, a TKAT central board representative attends the local governing board meetings and acts as a link between the two.

You are starting to build purposeful and productive relationships with parents, including through the range of support you are developing, for example through parenting classes, coffee mornings and relevant workshops. Communication with parents is gradually improving. However, there is more work to be done in this area to ensure that parents feel well informed and listened to. Letters and newsletters are now sent to parents to keep them informed about school news and any staff changes, although information available on the school website is often incomplete or out of date. You are aware of this and are currently undertaking a full review of the website.

### **External support**

The trust provides timely and focused support to you and the senior and middle leaders in all aspects of the school's work. Staff training provided by TKAT since the last inspection is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The trust's close work with leaders, including regular quality assurance visits, is supporting improvement effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust (TKAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Prince  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**