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Kathryn McMurtary
Headteacher
St Christopher's CEVCP School
Bellflower Crescent
Red Lodge
IP28 8XQ

Dear Mrs McMurtary

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Christopher's CEVCP School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- Improve the quality of action planning so that all staff know exactly their role in achieving the objectives, how success will be measured and when.
- Ensure that the headteacher has an achievable and sustainable workload so that she is able to concentrate on strategic planning in this rapidly expanding school.
- Develop an effective system for tracking individual and groups of pupils' progress so that leaders and managers can quickly see if pupils are falling behind and adjust the provision to get them back on track.
- Ensure staff effectiveness by monitoring and tracking teaching, learning and leadership as well as developing strong systems for developing staff and managing their performance.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the acting deputy and governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A representative from the local authority was contacted by phone. The school's action plans were evaluated. We discussed the school's most recent information on pupils' achievement. You and the deputy conducted me on a tour of the school visiting all classes briefly.

Context

Three new teachers joined the school in September to accommodate an increase in pupil numbers. The former acting deputy has been seconded to another school for this term and is returning in January 2014. Meanwhile a senior leader from another local school is covering this role for one term only. The next phase of the building programme is set to begin in January 2014.

Main findings

The school is growing rapidly and leaders are overwhelmed with funding issues, building works and significant increases in pupil numbers. These are getting in the way and reducing their capacity to concentrate on the school's most important agenda – improving the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement. Lack of an adequate set-up allowance to resource the school when it moved into its new premises plunged the budget immediately into deficit. This is being managed well through a five-year plan to take the accounts into the black. Nonetheless, it has had a huge impact on staffing levels with key leaders teaching classes full time. This has weakened their capacity to monitor the school's work and manage staff's performance with sufficient rigour. Governors are concentrating their efforts on overcoming these barriers that is distracting them from getting up to speed on how well pupils are learning.

The basics for moving the school to good are not in place. The action plan is not fit for purpose as a tool to help the school to improve by its next inspection. The electronic system to gather information on pupils' progress and attainment is underdeveloped limiting the school's effectiveness in tracking the achievement of different groups of pupils. The school had its 2013 results for seven-year-olds and eleven-year-olds checked externally to make sure that they were accurate. This has given the school a secure baseline to build on in the future. Children made good progress from their starting points in Reception last year. However, the lack of an effective system to check their future progress hampers the school's chances of ensuring that this good progress is sustained in Year 1.

You are astutely aware of the school's changing community and the challenges it faces in moving from a small, established village school (formerly), to a school in the heart of a new housing development with a much more diverse community with some complex needs. The governing body ensures that funding for pupils eligible for the government's pupil premium funding is targeted for the pupils it is intended for. New government funding for sport is allocated to improve provision and participation in sports and physical activities to raise achievement.

HMI will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection and ensure that an opportunity to meet the full governing body is arranged at the time of the next visit.

External support

The school works closely with others in the local cluster enabling it to provide training for staff that is jointly funded by the group and would otherwise be unachievable. The local authority provides the same level of support that is available to similar primary schools in Suffolk that require improvement. It is not realising the unique situation that this school is facing and adjusting its support and allocation of funding accordingly. Support is generic rather than tailored to the school's needs. The local authority helped the school to find an acting deputy while the previous acting deputy is seconded to another school. It also provides the induction programme for teachers new to the profession and some focused training for the cluster schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk and the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector