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Lynsey Holzer
Headteacher
Poplars Community Primary School
St Margaret's Road
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Suffolk
NR32 4HN

Dear Ms Holzer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poplars Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 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 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 all lessons are taught at a level that is sufficiently demanding to challenge all those present.
- Disseminate and share the good practice seen, especially that in Year 6 where pupils develop skills of independent learning quickly.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated together with other school improvement documents. Close attention

was paid to the accuracy of the school's assessment of pupils' progress and learning. In order to evaluate learning a total of 13 lessons was visited, representing all Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 year groups.

Context

Since the last inspection a new literacy leader has been appointed. The responsibilities of subject and year leaders have been clarified. The school roll is increasing.

Main findings

The school has quickly developed a momentum of improvement because many of the issues identified at the last inspection were already recognised and work to tackle them had begun.

The unconfirmed results of national tests for 2013 show a much improved picture over 2012. In Key Stage 1 the proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding expected levels has improved to above the national average in all aspects of literacy, mathematics and science. In all key subjects pupils now attain standards that are higher than the national average.

In Key Stage 2 the progress that pupils make accelerates. When pupils leave at the end of Year 6 they have attained standards that are significantly above national average. For example in writing, the proportion attaining the higher Level 5 is 11% above the national average. The progress made by those with special educational needs is similar to their peers, and gaps between the progress of boys and girls are small. Those pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium make progress that is a little below their peers.

The school has, rightly, put much effort into the improvement of teaching. Teachers have quickly developed rigorous assessment techniques that are now providing clear and accurate indications of how well pupils are doing. This information is used well by leaders to monitor the progress of groups, for example different years. Teachers plan lessons extensively, however sometimes the progress that pupils make is limited because the lesson is not pitched at a level that challenges all. Occasionally lesson plans are too prescriptive, not allowing sufficient flexibility to take more time on a topic or move to a higher level when pupils are finding the work easy.

Exemplary practice was seen in some Year 6 classes where teachers taught all pupils at the same high level, carefully checking learning by accurate questioning to make sure that all had understood the topic. In these classes pupils quickly develop skills of independent and confident learning. School leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, and have an accurate understanding of what needs to be improved. However the system and documentation being used do not always spot lessons that

are not challenging enough. When this happens it is because too much attention is paid to what teachers do rather than what pupils learn.

You and your deputy have moved quickly to address issues identified at the last inspection. Improvement plans are detailed and challenging with clear targets for improvement and timescales. Performance management has improved, and all middle leaders and other staff are now held to account for the performance of their pupils. Staff have undertaken much professional development, especially those who have middle leader responsibilities. The external review of governance, recommended by the last inspection, has now taken place. This has confirmed the weaknesses identified by the inspection.

As a result of this review, a new governors' development plan has been written and a new Chair of the Governing Body, with considerable experience of school improvement and a good understanding of school performance data, has been appointed. Governors now recognise the need to challenge school staff and monitor rigorously and regularly progress towards targets.

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 school has taken advantage of support from a number of sources including the local authority. For example support has been provided for the Early Years Foundation Stage. However much development has been undertaken using the expertise that you, as a relatively new headteacher, have recognised within the school. Some of this expertise, for example in provision for children with special educational needs, is being used by other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector