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Elaine Hawes
Headteacher
Saxmundham Primary School
Brook Farm Road
Saxmundham
Suffolk
IP17 1XQ

Dear Mrs Hawes

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Saxmundham Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2012. 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:

- increase the proportion of pupils that make strong progress in Key Stage 2
- accelerate pupils' progress in writing
- take up the local authority adviser's offer to broker links with two successful schools in order to:
 - improve the teaching of writing, particularly to pupils at an early stage of learning English and those with low prior attainment
 - support teachers whose lessons sometimes require improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself and other school leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated, taking into account amendments made since the last visit. Three lessons were observed involving pupils from Years 5 and 6.

Context

Saxmundham Primary School has just completed its first year as a full age-range primary school. The first Year 6 cohort had a high proportion of pupils who were disabled or had special educational needs. The school has had an unusually high number of 20 casual admissions this year in addition to the 42 who joined the new Reception class. Six of the new pupils have joined Year 6.

Main findings

The school's first ever Key Stage 2 results showed below average attainment. In reading, writing and mathematics, the proportion of pupils making the progress expected during Key Stage 2 was in line with the national average. However, the proportion making better than expected progress was below average. The school made good use of its Pupil Premium funding to ensure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils matched that of other pupils.

Achievement is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Standards among pupils who completed Key Stage 1 in 2013 were average. The outcomes of the Year 1 phonics check were also average. Internal assessment data shows that standards in writing in Years 4, 5 and 6 are lower than expected, given the pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2. Key Stage 2 pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is more in line with expectation. Several of the new pupils are working below the levels expected for their age and some are at an early stage of learning English. The school has targeted these pupils for additional support to help them catch up.

A recent review carried out by the local authority recognised improvements in teaching but noted that some still requires improvement. The teaching seen during this visit was good. One mathematics lesson included good use of apparatus and diagrams to help pupils understand and successfully carry out the conversion of mixed numbers to improper fractions, and vice versa. Another mathematics lesson included an easily understood problem with the potential for stronger pupils to not only find the solutions, but also to explain how they knew that had found all possible solutions. This lesson featured strong development of pupils' reasoning skills. In a writing lesson, pupils learned to write a newspaper-style report after making notes as another pupil recounted an interesting experience. Most pupils were able to make good progress, including some with weak literacy skills or limited knowledge of English. However, a few pupils continue to find it difficult to retain the information they need long enough to write about it.

One of the most noticeable changes since the last visit is the increased drive evident among you and your senior leaders, responding strongly to the tough messages delivered by the local authority review in September. Pupils' progress is still being tracked closely, but you have now ensured that all staff and governors receive and understand summary data on the average rates of progress and the proportions making expected progress. Teachers have a better understanding of how they can contribute to 'getting the school to good' and governors now have the information they need to hold the school to account.

The school's capacity for improvement has been boosted as you have delegated more effectively to harness the energy and experience of the deputy headteacher and the key subject leaders. For example, the two mathematics specialist teachers have provided training for their colleagues on teaching mathematics in a more exploratory way that helps deepen pupils' understanding. In addition, the school has introduced a system known as 'assertive mentoring' in mathematics. This pinpoints any gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. It is backed up by extra teaching, tailored to individual needs, to fill those gaps. As a result, pupils' progress is improving in mathematics. A similar system is now being introduced to tackle individual weaknesses in reading and comprehension.

Teachers are being encouraged to improve their own teaching by working in groups of three to observe and reflect upon each other's lessons. Importantly, the school has also worked hard to increase parental involvement and to raise expectations among pupils, parents and staff. Pupils are now better informed about how well they are doing and how to improve further. Governors are now asking more relevant questions because they are visiting the school more often and making better use of data to hold leaders to account.

External support

The local authority conducted a frank review of the school in September. It continues to support the school, for example through the forthcoming adviser visits to support subject leaders, and through its offer to broker links with two teaching schools: one with a strong track record in improving writing and one with a highly regarded 'improving teaching' programme.

New links have been established with other schools to learn from their experience in areas such as assessment and the Early Years Foundation Stage and to obtain support and training for the new special educational needs coordinator. Leaders have made good use of courses from independent providers: one in improving the rigour of lesson observation; the other in developing better assessment.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. The school continues to provide regular updates on pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector