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Pam Rose
King's Ford Infant School and Nursery
Gloucester Avenue
Shrub End
Colchester
CO2 9AZ

Dear Mrs Rose

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to King's Ford Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 20 November 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 July 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:

- swiftly implement the recommendations made by the local authority review of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- provide governors with much clearer information about pupil achievement.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, two members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school action plan, minutes of governing body meetings, reviews by the local authority and the school's monitoring and assessment documentation. You accompanied me during brief visits to all classes in the school, where we observed teaching and looked at pupils' work.

Context

A teacher in the nursery has left since the inspection, and the school has appointed a replacement. A temporary teacher is providing cover for a teacher who is on maternity leave. The school has appointed a teacher to provide weekly cover for teachers during their preparation, planning and assessment time. The number of learning support assistants has increased.

Main findings

You have raised the quality of teaching in the school by methodically addressing the issues raised by the inspection in July. For example, teachers' planning and the way that they mark pupils' work have improved because of the regular and focused monitoring of both areas. At the same time, you have looked carefully at pupils' work and are holding teachers to account for their progress. The school is focusing on the right areas. Your action plan sets out what you need to do but the time-scales on the plan are not clear enough and it is difficult to see how you are evaluating the impact of your actions.

Pupils' writing is improving. You have made this a priority and there is evidence in pupils' work that your work is bearing fruit. Pupils enjoy their lessons. Your revised approach to the teaching of phonics is improving reading. Teachers direct children well in the reception class to activities that support their learning. Staff in the reception class work well together to keep children focused on learning. This is not as effective in the nursery where some activities do not match the learning needs of individual children. In the nursery, staff frequently miss opportunities to promote and inspire learning in the outdoor learning area, as they supervise rather than lead learning.

You have an accurate view of how well the school is doing. You are making good use of the expertise within the senior leadership team and are monitoring lessons and pupils' progress systematically. This is generating a large amount of information. You are aware of the key messages that this is telling you and have worked with your staff to make improvements where necessary. There are some inconsistencies, and you are not acting swiftly enough to remedy some of them. For example, you have had concerns about the quality of planning in the nursery since the beginning of the term, but have not resolved this to your satisfaction.

Governors have responded well to the recent review of their practice. A new committee structure focuses on how the school is improving in terms of achievement and the quality of teaching. This has already resulted in governors asking better and more searching questions. For example, governors scrutinised the school's tracking data and have asked why certain groups, such as boys, are not improving at the same rate as girls. The information that the governors routinely receive from you

about achievement is not clear enough. As a result, governors spend too much time having things explained to them. This limits the amount of time that they spend interrogating the data and planning to make things better.

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

You have sought several different types of support from the local authority. You now have a 'coach headteacher' from a successful school who provides valuable mentoring. Two teachers are attending an 'improving teaching' course, and are benefitting from the good practice that they are seeing. A local authority adviser was also involved in the writing of the 'post Ofsted action plan. An Early Years Foundation Stage adviser visited the school in response to your request for an independent review of this part of the school. You have very recently received the outcomes of this review and the recommended actions are in line with your own views. These were confirmed during my observations in the nursery.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector