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Jane Ash
Headteacher
Elmswell Community Primary School
Oxer Close
Elmswell
Bury St Edmunds
IP30 9UE

Dear Mrs Ash

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elmswell Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 April 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection; the governors' response has not been as rapid. The school should take further action to:

- use recently appointed key stage co-ordinators to model aspects of best practice for their colleagues and implement the plans for them to regularly monitor the quality of teaching, learning and progress
- urgently implement the action plan to improve the quality of governance and ensure the bespoke training recommended in the review of governance is undertaken rapidly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you together with the upper Key Stage 2 leader, who is also the English subject leader, and the local authority challenge

partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan, analysis of achievement and monitoring records were evaluated. We visited all classes, looked at pupils' work and spoke to some about their learning.

Context

Since the last inspection, two new appointments have been made to the administration team, the Key Stage 1 leader has left the school and four new teachers have been appointed. For the second year running, there are significant staff changes. Temporary teaching covers the ill health absence of a senior leader. The Chair of Governors was away at the time of this visit and no other governors were available to meet with me.

Main findings

You have taken rigorous and determined action to secure a leadership team with the expertise to drive the school's improvement rapidly. The action plan has appropriate objectives linked to the recommendations from the last inspection. Timescales and responsibilities of staff are identified explicitly and it is clear how and when success will be measured. You have improved systems for marking pupils' work and for providing them with feedback about their learning. Although a small number of teachers are not using these strategies well enough, where this practice is strong, pupils say it is helping them to understand what they are doing well and what they need to do next to improve. Your analysis shows a good understanding of the remaining weaknesses in teaching and you have plans in place to provide both support and challenge to ensure these are addressed appropriately.

The English subject leader has taken effective action to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' writing, to provide a programme of targeted training and to improve the learning environment in classrooms so that children are encouraged to engage in improving their skills more. As a result, there is an emerging picture of improved quality however, presentation is not good enough. Further work is planned to embed the higher expectations established.

The intensive approach taken to reshaping and improving how phonics (the sounds that letters make) is taught has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of pupils achieving the expected standard in Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils benefit from tightly structured lessons and, where teaching is best, some of the youngest pupils spell and write independently with confidence.

Inconsistencies in the accuracy and quality of assessment and learning have been identified in the Early Years Foundation Stage. During the visit, it was evident that pupils enter Year 1 with a range of skills and varying levels of confidence in how they use these.

Following the inspection, a local authority review of governance was undertaken; a number of recommendations were made and a draft action plan provided. It appears that neither the review outcomes nor the action plan have been shared and discussed at a full governing body meeting. I will visit the school again as soon as possible to check that the governors are acting on the recommendations from the review of governance.

Ofsted may also carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Prior to the inspection the local authority had allocated a challenge partner, who is a local headteacher, to work with the school. Her work has been good in endorsing the decisions and actions taken by the headteacher, in monitoring the work of the school and in confirming what needs to improve so that assessment is accurate and teaching is good. In response to analysis she has undertaken with the headteacher, the local authority has provided advisor support to moderate assessment, improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and to improve marking and the verbal feedback given to pupils. The headteacher and challenge partner are keen to continue this work and to extend it to engage the full leadership team. No further action has been taken to follow up the recommendations of the review of governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector