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Doretta Cowie
Alton Park Junior School
Alton Park Road
Clacton-on-Sea
CO15 1DL

Dear Mrs Cowie

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alton Park Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 May 2014. 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 frequency of lesson observations to ensure that teachers receive clear feedback about what went well and what needs to improve
- ensure that recommendations for improvement from lesson observations are followed up quickly to ensure matters have improved
- ensure that school improvement plans include measureable criteria to enable governors and others to monitor the school's success in making improvements

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other leaders. We toured the classrooms together. I met with eight members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I looked at documents including the school's improvement plans, achievement data and records of your monitoring activities. I checked the safeguarding procedures for the appointment of new members of staff.

Main findings

The headteacher and governors are determined to improve outcomes for pupils by improving the quality of teaching. The priorities and actions detailed in the school's improvement plans are appropriate. However, some of the criteria to measure the success of the school's actions are not specific enough. This makes it difficult for governors and others to check the school's progress rigorously. These impact measures need to be more closely linked to measurable outcomes, for instance in achievement data or the quality of teaching overtime.

Senior leaders visit classrooms to monitor the quality of teaching and books are evaluated to measure pupils' progress. Visits to classrooms are not frequent enough, however, to ensure that teachers receive regular feedback about how to improve teaching. Some recommendations for improvements are not followed up quickly enough with subsequent visits to ensure matters have improved. In some classes pupils find it difficult to maintain concentration and some are not fully engaged with learning throughout lessons.

Teachers have received training, including in the teaching of phonics (the sounds letters represent) and several teachers are due to begin training brokered by the local authority to improve their practice.

Some members of the governing body have recent and extensive backgrounds in education. These and some of the other members of the governing body have the skills and knowledge to challenge school leaders rigorously, including by scrutinising achievement data. A minority of governors would like more support in clarifying their roles and the role of the local authority in monitoring the school's progress.

The required safeguarding checks on members of staff prior to their appointment are carried out and recorded diligently. The school has a useful induction pack for new volunteers to the school. This includes safeguarding information and procedures.

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 local authority has been supporting the school for some time and prior to the section 5 inspection. As a result of this support and training some elements of teaching have improved. The local authority has brokered further training to improve teaching and a link with a local academy to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. The local authority conducts regular reviews of teaching, learning and leadership and plan to conduct a further audit in the spring term.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector