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Paul Arch
Headteacher
Piper's Vale Community Primary School
Raeburn Road
Ipswich
IP3 0EW

Dear Mr Arch

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Piper's Vale Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2015, 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- extend the action plan to cover more than one term
- improve the action plan by making all targets aspirational as well as realistic; addressing all action points fully and adding suitable deadlines and milestones; making all targets measurable and ensuring that the governing body's role in monitoring the plan is clear
- increase the sense of urgency in addressing weaknesses in the quality of the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make).

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to

discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and you took me on a tour of the school. I checked the school's single central register.

Context

Since the last inspection, the assistant headteacher has returned from maternity leave and the deputy headteacher has started her period of planned absence. Middle leaders are taking turns to act in the role of assistant headteacher during the deputy headteacher's absence. The established special educational needs coordinator retired at the end of last term and a new coordinator joined the school in January. A newly qualified teacher also left the school at the end of last term and has not been replaced.

Main findings

The school's action plan is appropriately detailed and focuses on the issues identified by the previous inspection. The plan includes success criteria and you have sensibly ensured that a named person has responsibility for each key action. The plan includes dates when actions are to take place and includes the expected impact of each action. A detailed monitoring plan – showing when lesson observations and scrutinies of pupils' work are to take place – accompanies the main action plan.

However, the action plan covers only the current term and this means that clear, longer-term planning is missing. You now need to take a more strategic view in order to plot what needs to be done, and by when, in order to become a good or outstanding school within the prescribed timeframe. It is not clear enough how the plan will be monitored, and the role of the governors in doing so is also unclear.

Success criteria for some actions need to be more aspirational. For example, the target set for increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the level of the Year 1 phonics screening check is well below the 2014 national average. In some instances, success criteria are not specific enough and cannot be measured. The actions to improve the quality of teaching in phonics are not well focused and do not have a sufficient sense of urgency. The plan does not fully address how the quality of teaching generally will be improved, particularly for the most able pupils.

Since the last inspection you have taken a number of actions to improve the teaching of phonics and you told me that you can see improvements in teachers' planning and that there is now more challenge in lessons. You now need to increase the sense of urgency in addressing this area to ensure that phonics teaching improves rapidly and all pupils make good progress.

In addition to the improvement points from the last inspection, you have sensibly chosen to also focus on developing pupils' spelling and grammar skills. An audit has been carried out and you now have a clear overview of this area of teaching and

learning. You are currently focusing on improving teachers' subject knowledge but it is too soon to judge the impact of this.

In order to improve the quality of teaching, you have prioritised encouraging a 'culture of reflectiveness' and you told me that staff are now more open, more mutually supportive and better able to accept constructive criticism from their peers. You have introduced a peer mentoring approach and you told me that this beginning to work well, although it is still in its infancy.

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 supports the school well. A school improvement board is in place and meets regularly. An adviser from the local authority carried out an audit of spelling and grammar teaching, throughout the school, and provided a very useful overview of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Although it has done in the past, the local authority has not yet supported the school in improving the quality of the teaching of phonics, since it became a key action for the school to improve. The local authority might usefully consider providing advisory support, as a matter of urgency, to help the school to make more rapid progress in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Director of Children's Services