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

Dear Mrs Ash

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elmswell Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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:

- ensure plans to improve the analysis of the progress made by, and the support given, to pupils who have special educational needs are rapidly implemented at the start of the autumn term
- reintroduce the rigorous monitoring of teaching in place at the last visit.

Evidence

This visit was made principally to meet with the Chair of the Governing Body because no governors had been available to meet me at the initial monitoring visit. Meetings were also held with the headteacher and a representative of the local

authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Visits were made to some classes, the Early Years Foundation Stage in particular.

Context

There has been significant change in membership of the governing body since the last monitoring visit. The Chair of the Governing Body resigned shortly after the visit and subsequently his replacement also resigned. The governing body now has six members. Two associate members appointed with the support of the local authority are no longer fulfilling this role.

An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed on a temporary basis to cover the long term absence of the substantive post holder and an acting head of the Early Years Foundation Stage has also been appointed.

Changes in staffing have continued and there are currently temporary teaching arrangements in some classes including the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 1/2, Year 3 and Year 5. A stable complement of staffing, which incorporates a new leadership position in lower Key Stage 2, is in place for September.

Her Majesty's Inspector was aware during this inspection that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

Main findings

Governance has improved and is now secure. The Chair of the Governing Body, well supported by other governors, brings relevant expertise and knowledge to support the drive for improvement. Governors have the skills and understanding necessary both to hold leaders to account for the standards achieved by pupils and to offer support where it is needed. Because there are still vacancies on the governing body, the chair is seeking interim additional support from governors of other local schools.

Almost all of the priorities identified in the governors' action plan, created following the review of governance in May 2014, have now been addressed. As a result, governors' monitoring of improvement is directly linked to the most important priorities. Governors prepare questions against the information about the school's work they receive prior to meetings. The level of challenge has been raised and they are better informed about the weaker aspects of the school's work. Through targeted monitoring they know how staff performance is managed and are checking that weaker aspects are challenged and good performance is rewarded.

Arrangements are in place to communicate more effectively with parents to involve them better in understanding the work of the school and to identify and address any areas of concern.

The headteacher has taken time to seek advice and manage a range of staffing issues over the past two terms and these have resulted in significant changes on both a permanent and temporary basis. As a result of the advice, procedures for managing staffing concerns are more rigorous and appropriate. It has also meant that time available for monitoring teaching and for leading the provision for pupils who have special educational needs has been limited. Nevertheless, improvement is evident and overall pupils' achievement is rising. New leadership arrangements to manage the provision for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are in place for September.

Weaknesses in the quality of early years provision seen at the last visit are being addressed because staff are working more closely together across the two classes and leaders are using good practice to model expectations. Children's work shows more similar levels of progress and attainment across classes. Where teaching is best, children are offered better planned, more imaginative opportunities to learn and develop their skills. Assessment information suggests that a greater proportion of children will achieve the expected 'good level of development' than in previous years; this proportion is above the 2014 national achievement level. These improvements are evident in children's work, in the better quality of assessment of their progress and in the use of this to plan the next steps in their learning.

Analysis of assessment information suggests that the school's first cohort of Year 6 pupils are on track to reach outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics that are in line with the 2014 national standards at the expected Level 4, but above them at the higher Level 5. The vast majority are on track to make expected progress and broadly half are expected to exceed this. This is improved achievement for the school.

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

External support

A full review of the school by the local authority was planned for the two days following this visit. There has been a lack of confidence between the headteacher and the local authority; three different challenge partners have worked with leaders since September so there has been a lack of continuity and in some instances, duplication of information. Good support has however been provided to facilitate the improvements made to provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for helping leaders ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate in Years 2 and 6.

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

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner

Her Majesty's Inspector

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority