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Mr Lee Regan
Interim Executive Headteacher
Middleton Community Primary School
Middleton
Saxmundham
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Dear Mr Regan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Middleton Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the head of school, the chair and another member of the interim executive board (IEB), and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plans were evaluated and we observed three lessons together. I looked at a range of school documents and checked the school's single central register.

Context

The substantive executive headteacher retired at the end of the summer term and you took up your post, as interim executive headteacher, at the beginning of September. A member of the existing teaching staff was promoted to head of school when the previous post holder left the school. Two newly qualified teachers joined

the school in September. A teaching and learning lead has been appointed for two terms to work across all four schools in the federation. The governing body was disbanded at the end of the summer term and an IEB has been in place since July 2015.

Main findings

In addition to the strategic development plan for the federation as a whole, the school has its own action plan, written to address the areas for improvement from the inspection in June. The plan includes a range of appropriate actions, timescales and success criteria, and identifies key personnel. It would be improved by making success criteria measurable and by making monitoring activity clearer and more explicit.

The new leadership team is beginning to establish itself well. You spend a set day in each school every week so that pupils, parents and staff know when you will be at Middleton and where you can be contacted on days when you are elsewhere. This is working well. The new head of school is becoming more familiar with her role and clearly appreciates having you, an experienced school leader, to provide coaching and mentoring for her. You told me that the head of school has created a very positive atmosphere in the school and that was clearly apparent during this monitoring inspection.

You told me that you and the head of school are able to see improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The teaching and learning lead is working with both newly qualified teachers and this coaching opportunity is valued by them. An appropriate range of work was evident in the exercise books that I looked at. There were some emerging strengths in the teaching that you and I observed together. However, we also observed teaching where the choice of task was not well matched to pupils' needs and interests.

Since September there has been an increased focus on working as a federation. Middleton is already benefiting from this more collaborative approach. For example, the mathematics leader's work is now having an impact at Middleton; teachers are using 'manipulatives' regularly in their teaching and pupils are benefiting from having this concrete apparatus to support their understanding of what they are taught.

In both the Year 3/4 class and the Year R/1/2 class, the physical accommodation and the classroom itself hampers teaching. The Year 3/4 class is housed in the school hall and the teacher faces a constant battle against interruptions and distractions, such as the hall being set up for lunch while she continues to teach mathematics to her class. In the Year R/1/2 class, the teacher is challenged by the lack of suitable space to ensure that she provides for two separate curriculum programmes and two separate key stages in the same class. It is important that you and the IEB consider whether there is a way to house all three of the school's

classes in accommodation more suited to the needs of the pupils and the phase of their education.

An outdoor learning area for the early years has now been created and, as a result, a range of activities are now offered to the children outside. However, these activities are not focused enough. Staff need to be clear about what the learning intention is behind each activity so that children are not simply playing for playing's sake during curriculum time.

The IEB is newly formed and has met twice since it was established in July. One member of the IEB has particular responsibility for Middleton and he is developing a clear view of the school. The members of the IEB have a wide range of experience of school governance, including successful tenures as chairs of governing bodies, members of school improvement boards and members of other IEBs. It is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the IEB in ensuring prompt improvement and in holding the school's leaders to account.

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

The local authority supports the school well. Although the federation's schools fall into different 'localities', the local authority has sensibly arranged for one standards and excellence officer to work across all four schools. This provides greater continuity and reduces the burden on the school. The local authority appointed an IEB to strengthen the governance of the school. Local authority advisers continue to provide training and support to the school, and to the federation, as required.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the chair of the IEB and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk County Council.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector