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Mr Neil Hodgkins  
Devonshire Primary Academy  
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Blackpool  
Lancashire  
FY3 8AF

Dear Mr Hodgkins

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Devonshire Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 15 December 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. 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 in order to become a good academy. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that the academy's website meets requirements
- enhance the academy's action plan by refining the success criteria and milestones so that governors can more easily check actions are having the desired impacts
- complete the external review of governance and implement its recommendations.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a group of pupils and four representatives of the governing body. I also met with three members of the multi-academy trust, including one member who represents the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The academy's

action plan was evaluated, and other documents relating to academy improvement and information relating to pupils' achievement were scrutinised. I accompanied you and your senior leaders on visits to classrooms to see the academy at work. I also considered the work in some pupils' books.

## **Context**

Since the last section 5 inspection, eight staff have left for a variety of reasons including retirement and maternity leave. One member of staff is currently on secondment to provide additional support for a school facing challenging circumstances. A new deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and phase leader started working at the academy in September 2015, along with three newly qualified teachers and one recently qualified teacher.

## **Main findings**

Since the last inspection, you have acted quickly to plan and implement appropriate actions that are improving the academy. A new deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed who have strengthened the senior leadership team. They bring additional experience and expertise in rapid academy improvement and share your commitment to ensure that pupils receive the best education possible. You have also appointed an experienced phase leader for Key Stage 2, who has particular expertise in the analysis of assessment information. A review of leaders' roles and responsibilities has been undertaken. All leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and accountabilities; there is a sense of direction and determination.

Your action plan is structured well and includes appropriate actions to improve the academy. The success criteria and milestones identified in the plan require further refinement to enable senior leaders and governors to be able to check easily that actions are having the expected impact and that improvements are on schedule.

Governors have begun the external review of their work recommended at the last inspection and it will be completed shortly. There was an initial delay caused by a decision to change the reviewer but this has not slowed governors' pace of actions to improve their practice. Governors have sought and completed additional training from both the local authority and senior leaders in the academy and, as a result, have a better understanding of new assessment information. Governors visit frequently and ask probing questions at their regular meetings. Consequently, governors are well informed about the impact of the actions the academy is taking to become good; they hold you and the leadership team to account. Governors recognise, however, that they must make some minor amendments to the academy's website for it to fully meet requirements regarding their membership and attendance.

Leaders have a better understanding of pupils' achievement because they check more frequently on the impact that teachers are having on pupils' learning. Senior leaders and subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, regularly observe teaching, look at planning and scrutinise the work in pupils' books. Pupils told me proudly that you and the deputy headteacher often check up to see if they are learning by watching them at work or looking at their books. The new tracking system allows you to monitor more closely the progress and attainment of pupils. As a result, leaders are better informed about how well different individuals, groups and classes achieve in different subjects. This heightened level of analysis also allows you to hold teachers more closely to account during formal meetings to discuss pupils' progress. You also give the governors a clear picture of achievement.

Your assistant headteacher is leading the drive to improve outcomes in the early years. Teachers' planning now focuses on how they can help children achieve the outcomes expected of them, rather than on planning activities for them to do. The teaching of phonics, the sounds letters make, is now more carefully matched to the needs and abilities of children because extra staff and the better use of teaching assistants means that lessons are more precisely focused on children's needs. Leaders recognise that this precision is not consistent in all classes and are taking appropriate actions to ensure that it is. Outdoor provision is being enhanced further; this builds on work started in the summer term by the previous early years leader. The development of new interesting and exciting activity areas, including a mud kitchen, allows children to apply and enhance their skills while having fun. Additionally, training for teaching assistants in the early years has improved their expertise and confidence to lead learning both indoors and outside. Consequently, children in the early years are making better progress from their starting points.

The quality of teaching is improving because of the actions you are taking. Some teachers, particularly in the early years, have had opportunities to visit other schools to see good practice while further visits are planned. As a consequence of guidance from the early years leader, teachers in lower Key Stage 1 now implement some early years curriculum and build on the teaching techniques used in early years. This is helping some pupils, who were not ready for Key Stage 1 when they left the Reception Year, to catch up.

The support and guidance you and other senior leaders have given to teachers, and the introduction of a common template for their planning, means that teachers build on pupils' prior learning and plan lessons that more closely meet pupils' needs and abilities. Teachers now consistently use clear success criteria and prompts to ensure that pupils make the best progress in lessons and maintain high levels of presentation and pride in their work. You have shared your expectations about the effective use of teaching assistants and you have provided additional training where necessary. Consequently, teaching assistants are now more effectively used in classes to promote learning; they are making a positive difference.

You have reviewed and updated the academy's marking and feedback policy. As a result of this, pupils now receive better guidance on how to improve their work, and understand their next steps in learning more clearly. Pupils appreciate their teachers' feedback. They told me that they especially like the opportunities given to them to use their 'purple polishing pens' to make improvements to their work and make more progress.

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

### **External support**

The academy draws well upon the support and challenge provided by the trust. Trust senior leaders, including those who represent the local authority, meet frequently to evaluate the progress of the academy. Other local authority officers visit frequently to provide additional guidance and support. The trust has brokered additional opportunities for staff to see good practice in other schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Blackpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**