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Dear Suzanne Ryan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fingringhoe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 2016, 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 January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the monitoring inspection that took place in July 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, with the support of governors, continue to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all groups of pupils, especially boys and those pupils who are of middle ability, make the best progress they can, particularly in mathematics
- regularly check on pupils' progress in classes where teaching arrangements have altered since the previous monitoring inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher,

and four members of the governing body including the chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The plans for school improvement were evaluated along with the school's own self-evaluation. I undertook learning observations with you, and looked at work in pupils' books with you and your deputy headteacher, in your roles as English and mathematics subject leaders. We discussed monitoring activities, pupils' outcomes in each year group, and the impact of performance management. I also reviewed safeguarding procedures in the school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, you have ceased working remotely from home and are now back in school for the majority of the time. The deputy headteacher ably led the school as acting head of school until October, supported by a local executive headteacher. The impact of this support has ensured that Fingringhoe continues apace on its journey to being a good school.

Several other changes have taken place since the previous monitoring inspection. Due to the resignation of the substantive teacher in Years 4 and 5, the deputy headteacher will take over the class responsibility in January. Two other part-time teachers have left the school. However, you have successfully secured teachers for all classes.

It is testament to the school's strong supportive ethos that teachers who were previously part time have agreed to increase their commitment and take on full responsibility for their classes. Today, for example, in Year 6, we saw the excellent provision you have put in place to ensure that the pupils in these classes continue to receive good teaching on the one day a week that their substantive teacher will not be in school. The two well-known and experienced members of staff who will be taking these classes have already accepted the challenge. Due to staffing changes, there have also been changes in responsibility for leading mathematics, English and special educational needs across the school.

Main findings

The previous monitoring inspection highlighted some areas that you should continue to work on, which we discussed today, in particular the arrangements for leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities, the effectiveness of leadership of mathematics, and ensuring that pupils in all year groups are achieving as well as they can. You, your team and your governors have effectively ensured that all of these aspects have been acted upon.

One key feature you have identified has been the work that you have done with governors to restructure the start of the school day. Pupils now come into school and immediately start work when, as governors say, 'pupils are at their freshest'. Governors' monitoring has shown that 'the impact of this one change has been

massive'. Pupils settle quickly and are ready for the school day (as I saw during my visit today).

Leadership of key roles within the school has changed considerably since the previous monitoring inspection. On your return to full-time work, you have taken on the position of special educational needs coordinator. This is particularly effective as you have considerable expertise in this area. You have already ensured that all pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well within and outside of the classroom, as current school assessment information confirms.

It was also evident from the learning observations we did together today, that teachers plan work that is appropriate to the needs of this group of pupils, and the support they receive from experienced teaching assistants is effective. Your deputy headteacher now has the role of mathematics subject lead and you have resumed your role as lead for English. While it is accepted that this is currently the best use of your team's collective expertise and time, governors are aware that both you and your deputy headteacher have a considerable teaching and leadership commitment. However, at present the arrangement is affording both of you a very good overview of standards and achievement in these key areas. This has ensured that the school development plan and the school's own self-evaluation are accurate and focus on the areas of priority.

It was clear from the scrutiny of pupils' work that the three of us undertook today that almost all pupils are making expected progress in writing and mathematics. In many year groups there is a growing proportion of pupils who are exceeding expected progress, particularly in writing throughout the school, and in key stage 2 in mathematics.

Despite your disappointment with the 2016 attainment of Year 6, progress of pupils currently within the school reflects an improving picture. Mathematics was the area in which pupils achieved less well in 2016, particularly in respect of those pupils who were middle ability when they were in key stage 1. The impact of these poor results on Year 6's overall attainment was considerable, with only 27% of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. However, progress for this group of pupils in reading and writing was above the national average.

You have worked hard to ensure that results for Year 6 in 2017 will be considerably better. You have, for example, decided to have Year 6 as a single year group. The proportion of pupils who will achieve the expected and the higher standard in these subjects is set to improve on 2016.

You accept that teachers are still not challenging pupils as much as they could, particularly in mathematics. The work that the school has done to encourage pupils to talk about their learning in both writing and mathematics is beginning to pay dividends. You have insisted on teachers routinely providing practical mathematics

resources for pupils to use. You have already seen the difference this is making to the application of their mathematics skills in areas such as reasoning and problem-solving. You are confident, from the monitoring that both you and your governors have already done, that outcomes in the forthcoming assessments at the end of December will continue to improve on those collated in October.

Pupils continue to attain below the national average at the end of key stage 1, although their progress has been at least that which would be expected of them. There is, however, a considerable difference between boys' and girls' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. This year you have combined Years 2 and 3, and Reception and Year 1, in two teaching groups. It was evident from the visit today that this is having a very beneficial effect on raising pupils' aspirations in each year group. For example, pupils in Year 1 were writing independently about what they might take on their trip to the moon. Not only were they helping each other with ideas, but they also supported each other with sounding out and often correctly spelling words with which they were unfamiliar. Boys and girls alike were keen to write and eager to tell me about their intended journey to the moon. Similarly in Year 2, pupils were ably composing descriptive poems, having read a story about a troll. 'We've used expanded noun phrases' said one pupil. The work was of high quality. One pupil wrote about the troll 'plodding under the smelly bridge' while another described him as 'the angry, sad and overweight troll'.

Governors ensure that safeguarding continues to be effective while also challenging leaders about pupils' outcomes. The governing body has supported leaders in holding teachers to account for the achievement of pupils in their classes. Because each of these classes has the additional challenge of catering for two year groups, with the exception of Year 6, it is imperative that teaching is at least good across the school. In that quest, and since the previous monitoring inspection, governors have supported leaders in the recruitment of nothing less than good-quality teachers.

Governors have considerable experience and expertise, and use their time in school wisely. They have benefited hugely from the work that they have undertaken with you, the local authority and the executive headteacher who has been supporting the school. As a result, governors' monitoring is sharply focused on the key priorities, about which they speak eloquently and knowledgeably. They have, for example, taken part in scrutiny of pupils' work, spoken with pupils about their learning, and worked with subject leaders to check on how well pupils are doing. The quality of governors' questioning and challenge is high. As a result, the information they request from you and your leaders has helped them to fully understand the progress that has been made. Governors have managed the challenges that the school has faced since the previous full inspection, and those that still lie ahead. When the school attends Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminars, it would be beneficial if a representative of the governing body were also able to attend.

External support

You have welcomed the support that the local authority, diocese and other schools have offered. The partnership you have developed with the executive headteacher who has been supporting the school has been very beneficial to you and your team. Governors say that they have found the experience of working with the local authority and executive headteacher very valuable in helping them to ensure that their monitoring is as effective as it can be.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector