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Claire Claydon  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Claydon

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gusford Community Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.**

The school should take further action to:

- update the school development plan with regular, evaluative evidence of improvement gained from leaders' and governors' routine monitoring of the school's work.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced significant disruption due to periods of closure during the pandemic and the need for groups of pupils and some staff to self-isolate. Since reopening in March 2021, almost all pupils have returned to school.

Changes have been made to the governing body, including a new chair and vice-chair of governors. The coordinator of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has left the school. An assistant leader is overseeing this aspect of the school's work on an interim basis. The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen. The Active Learning Academy Trust is currently leading a restructuring of staffing.

## **Main findings**

Trust leaders and governors are aware of inconsistencies in leaders' understanding of what the school's curriculum should be. A range of resources are in place to enable teachers to plan learning and make the curriculum intent clear. However, until recently, staff have relied on these resources too much to teach activities, rather than focusing on the quality of pupils' learning. Resources have not been adapted fully to develop a curriculum suited to the context of the school. Increasingly, pupils are provided with a broad range of more interesting and demanding learning. However, this is still not planned well in all subjects to enable them to build on their prior knowledge and make good progress.

Leaders have added further capacity to improve by training staff to lead aspects of the curriculum. Teams of leaders are in place to oversee the planning and teaching of mathematics, reading and writing. Leadership of foundation subjects is at an early stage of development. Some subjects are ahead of others in implementing improvements. For example, in science, pupils' books show that learning is suitably organised and enables them to build on what they have learned previously, and remember more.

A range of new resources have been introduced to aid the teaching of foundation subjects. Not all staff understand that these resources do not represent a curriculum but are designed to complement it. The trust has identified that further development of subject leaders is needed to gain greater consistency in the planning and implementation of the curriculum. Several subjects are 'work in progress'. Music and computing remain underdeveloped. When asked, pupils could not recall clearly what they have learned previously in music. In computing, pupils felt that the tasks set for them are not challenging enough.

Not all teachers regularly check that pupils, particularly the less able and those with SEND, have the phonic understanding they need. Staff do not take the same approach. This means that pupils cannot quickly grasp the meaning of letters and

sounds and read words for themselves; rather they repeat what teachers have said. Early writing is underdeveloped. In some classes, pupils write and read with confidence, but elsewhere they lack the spelling, grammar and vocabulary to write well. Expectations of some staff are still not high enough. In some classes, pupils' work is untidy, and at times left incomplete.

Leaders of reading in each key stage have been trained to lead improvements. This is adding further capacity to improve. Planning materials and the texts used by staff have been revised to gain consistency and re-engage pupils. There is a renewed focus on developing pupils' vocabulary and encouraging them to read more often. Leaders have restocked the library to promote reading for pleasure. When asked, almost all Year 6 pupils who met with the inspector were reading at home. A new reading scheme is being used alongside revised planning to gain consistency in the teaching of reading across all key stages. Initial assessments show that this is working and a higher proportion of pupils are reading at greater depth. However, this has not been fully evaluated to show that it is enabling pupils of all abilities to read confidently.

Leaders' monitoring has noted significant improvements in mathematics. New resources enable staff to plan learning in logical order throughout all key stages. Staff understand what needs to be taught in each year group to ensure curriculum coverage and ensure pupils gain the knowledge and understanding they need to move forward. Regular training for staff has helped to gain consistency in implementing the mathematics curriculum. Improved assessment is helping staff to revise their plans to help pupils to catch up on learning missed last year.

Elsewhere, assessment remains underdeveloped. Leaders are trialling a new assessment scheme to inform staff about pupils' learning and check that they are making enough progress. Leaders feel this new approach will reduce staff workload and provide them with the information about how well pupils are doing. Currently, it is unclear how teachers check that all pupils are learning well enough across subjects.

Changes have been made to provision in the early years but the leader has limited evidence of the impact these changes are having. Assessment is becoming more systematic and shows where further support is needed. This year, assessments have identified the need to strengthen children's speaking, communication and language skills. Following recent training, staff are using a national programme to provide support for children in need of support. This is at an early stage of development. Restricted access to the school building during the pandemic has prevented trust leaders from carrying out a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of this key stage.

## **Additional support**

Trust leaders, governors and staff have worked collectively to maintain pupils' safety and well-being during the pandemic, and keep them engaged in learning. During this period, they have reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding, behaviour management and the wider curriculum. They have had fewer opportunities to carry out routine monitoring of the quality of education.

The trust and a new governing body are realistic about the school's journey of improvement. They recognise that there remains a lot to do. An improvement board and a school improvement partner appointed by the trust are supporting and challenging leaders to bring about improvements at a faster rate. Currently, the school development plan has not been fully updated with sufficient evidence of the impact leaders are having on tackling key priorities and other emerging priorities.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, representatives of the Active Learning Academy Trust, including the chief executive officer (CEO), middle leaders, a group of pupils and an online meeting with trustees and governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector visited lessons in all key stages. The school's single central register of employment checks of staff was scrutinised.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the CEO of the Active Learning Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**