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Maureen Basford
Interim Headteacher
Earith Primary School
School Road
Earith
Huntingdon
PE28 3QB

Dear Mrs Basford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Earith Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 first 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that development points following your monitoring of teaching, including work scrutiny and lesson observations, are precise and quickly put into practice
- improve the quality of support provided by teaching assistants so that it is consistently good
- provide governors with a broad range of information, including a coherent plan for staff professional development and for improving subject leadership, so that they can evaluate progress without delay and check the value for money of their decisions.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and spoke with staff. I met three governors, including the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and the local authority

primary adviser. You joined me on a tour of the school. I observed part of a lesson in Year 6, looked at pupils' work and spoke with them. I read minutes of governing body meetings and checked the school's new policies. I scrutinised your termly action plans. I checked the single central record for newly appointed staff and verified that all staff have had training on safeguarding children or are booked to attend such training.

Context

The headteacher and one class teacher left in the middle of the summer term. In June you were asked by the local authority to lead the school jointly with another headteacher. In September you became the interim headteacher of the school. An assistant headteacher joined the school in April and is currently teaching the Year 6 class. The Year 2/3 class teacher is also new to the school.

Main findings

There is currently insufficient evidence to show that the school is making rapid progress towards becoming a good school. This is because actions to address the recommendations made in the last inspection were slow to start and some were ineffective. The school's summer term operational plan was not fit for purpose and the successes recorded were far too optimistic and not substantiated by evidence. For example, the evaluation of this plan states that pupils' work was good in literacy and maths. Results in 2014 do not support this view as they were poor. Current Year 6 pupils achieve well below expectation for their age because of a legacy of ineffective teaching. Pupils lack confidence in speaking and gaps in their understanding of grammar, added to their limited vocabulary, lead to low level written work.

During the summer term, governors did not challenge the effectiveness of the leadership promptly enough. For example, they did not ensure that a robust induction and training programme was in place for the new assistant headteacher. Consequently, when the headteacher left suddenly, there was insufficient capacity in the leadership to secure high-quality teaching in all classes. Pupils' behaviour deteriorated. Although staff attended training events, their professional development was not brought together in a coherent way to address the inspection recommendations. Governors did not verify the effectiveness of the training and no work was done on developing subject leadership.

The disruption to teaching and behaviour stabilised mid-June when the local authority intervened and, jointly with another interim headteacher, asked you to lead the school. Although there is still much to do, you are rising to the challenge and there are already signs of improvement. You are setting high expectation and quickly gaining the trust of staff. You know where teaching is effective and where it requires improvement. Your feedback to teachers following the evaluation of teaching must provide tight timescales to address any shortcomings and include clear action points where the impact of teaching assistants on pupils' achievement is insufficient.

With the support of all staff, you are ensuring that the school's policies are applied more consistently. As a result the presentation of pupils' work is improving and the new marking strategy is helping pupils understand what they need to do better. Your work on behaviour is a success. The number of fixed-term exclusions is much reduced and behaviour around the school is, in the word of a midday supervisor, *'much calmer than it was'*. I was able to concur with this as I visited classes and walked around the playground at lunch time. The pupils behaved well and played sensibly.

You are rightly prioritising urgent issues such as improving the learning environment and resources to support the curriculum and assessment, checking that the most vulnerable children are supported well to fill gaps in their knowledge and getting to know parents and carers. You provided me with a very good example of effective work with your local Traveller community.

I shall return to the school to carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority support is highly intensive. An adviser works one-and-a-half day per week in your school to improve teaching and learning. The early years and subjects advisers provide useful resources and professional expertise to teachers. You are contacting good and outstanding schools to learn from best practice. It is too early to see whether this external support is making a difference but staff are keen to reflect on their own practice and learn from others. In addition, the local authority primary adviser and senior officers are driving improvement through an imminent review of governance and frequent meetings of the Local Authority Intervention Group (LAIG).

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector