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Mrs Rae Aldous
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Aldous

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Grove Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in March 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, staff, representatives from the governing body and the director for school improvement from Active Learning Trust.

Together, we visited every class to observe pupils learning and spoke with them about their learning. With the senior leadership team, we evaluated work in a sample of pupils' books to determine the progress most-able pupils are making over time.

A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's record for the suitable employment of staff. The school improvement plan used by the trust, governors and school leaders was evaluated. The initial action plans that were originally submitted to Ofsted have now been updated and replaced.

Context

Since the full inspection, carried out in March 2017, there have been many significant changes to the senior leadership and management of Grove Primary School.

Following an external review of all its governing bodies in May 2017, trustees have outlined clearly the roles and responsibilities for local governance and the trust. The trust received a termination warning notice from the regional schools commissioner in July 2017. Nonetheless, the trust has acted swiftly and robustly to strengthen and develop the current senior leadership structure and ensure that the school is supported and challenged to improve.

The governing body at Grove Primary School has significantly changed and strengthened. The newly established governing body has a more focused responsibility for the sustained improvements in teaching and learning and for systematically challenging school leaders to raise pupils' achievement. Since October 2017, a highly experienced member of the board of trustees for Active Learning Trust has taken on the role of chair of governors.

Not only have there been significant changes within the governance, but senior leadership positions have also changed. The newly appointed headteacher at the time of the inspection in March 2017 has been replaced. The trust has joined two schools together and both are led by you, as the executive headteacher. You have quickly established a strong leadership team at Grove Primary School and established clear roles and responsibilities. As a result, the pace of school improvement has quickened, and the quality of leadership and management is rapidly improving.

There have been many staff changes since the previous inspection in both teaching and support staff. You have been successful in recruiting suitable teaching staff for the next academic year. Recently, a new family worker and business manager took up their posts. These staff are ensuring that important documents for child protection and safer recruitment are rigorous and compliant with statutory requirements, and the trust's current guidance and expectations. Records for the employment of staff were found to be robust and all checks in place.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have worked hard and have wasted no time since your appointment in identifying priorities of what needs to be achieved to improve the school. You have quickly created a senior team that shares your clear vision and determination to succeed. Your high expectations, vision and clear direction are valued by staff and pupils alike. Staff spoken with were appreciative of the professional development and the training they are now receiving. Your systematic approach is starting to

have a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning. You have not shied away from challenging staff to improve or change school structures that are no longer suitable.

The changes made to the senior leadership have increased the capacity and quality of school leadership. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly and appropriately. You and your leadership team have an accurate view of the areas for improvement and suitable plans are in place to improve pupils' achievement that are based on the areas identified at the full inspection. However, your school improvement plan would benefit from specific and timely interim targets so you and governors can measure the impact of your work precisely over time.

Staff spoke highly of the changes you have made since your appointment. They appreciate the clear direction and guidance they receive to improve. Those spoken with stated that staff morale is now much improved. They agree that their workload is considered when you make decisions, such as the recent changes made to the marking and feedback policy. One member of staff echoed the sentiment of many, saying, 'We feel trusted as professionals and valued. It is nice to come to work.' Newly qualified teachers receive the support and additional opportunities they need so that they can develop their skills and practice quickly. Consequently, you are beginning to identify that the quality of teaching is improving over time. You recognise that there is still some way to go before the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong in both key stages.

You have improved the school environment and ensure that adults celebrate pupils' work and achievements through the effective use of school displays. Pupils are proud of their work and complete their activities diligently. Pupils' workbooks show that, from Year 4, more are increasingly working at age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. There is an increase in the proportion of pupils who are beginning to work at the higher standards over time. Your school assessment records demonstrate that, this year, pupils' attainment in Year 6 is currently better than last year, particularly in reading. However, you acknowledge that this improvement is not yet consistent throughout the school.

An area of significant improvement has been the way that staff and leaders work with other schools across the trust. You value the quality and support from the schools in the local area. Your leadership and staff are working closely with others to ensure that their judgements about how well pupils are doing are accurate and rigorous.

Although some actions have yet to show demonstrable impact, you are taking the necessary steps to ensure good progress for all pupils. Through your regular communications with parents and carers, you and your team are restoring their confidence in the school leadership.

You are working closely with the trust hub leader to provide suitable training for staff. You are participating in a national project to improve the provision in the early years. This is starting to have an impact in raising children's achievement in the early years classes. This academic year, more children are on track to reach a good level of development, so their achievement is more in line with the national average and children are better prepared for Year 1.

The governing body is committed to improving its effectiveness. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that they are now asking more relevant and challenging questions of school leaders. Governors check the accuracy of the information they receive and report their findings in meetings. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, you recognise that the impact of their school visits could be more effective if these visits were more closely aligned with the school improvement priorities.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school should take further action to:

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - ensuring that improvement plans include specific interim targets, so leaders can measure the impact of their actions on raising pupils' achievement over time
 - governors focusing their visits more closely to the priorities identified in the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector