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Mrs Gail Burns
Headteacher
St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester
Camulodunum Way,
Berechurch Hall Road,
Colchester, CO2 9RA

Dear Mrs Burns

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester

Following my visit to your school on 25 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 June 2013. 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. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen improvement planning so that there is a laser-like focus on the most important issues of securing stable and strong staffing, improving marking and improving pupils' ability to write well
- accelerate the use of information and communications technology to improve learning
- demonstrate a more incisive understanding of the impact of pupil premium funding on the progress of different groups.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Together, we made short visits to all classes in the school. I evaluated your school action plans and spoke to some pupils.

Context

Since the inspection there have been several staff resignations. New appointments have been made for January 2014.

Main findings

The achievement of pupils in the school has been improving for some time, but by the time of the last inspection it had not improved quickly enough to be judged good. The two issues slowing the school's improvement were some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and much slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. At the time of this visit, your rigorous action to improve the quality of teaching has resulted in a situation where some teachers have left but the permanent replacements do not start until January.

You have brought in ideas from other schools to improve pupils' progress in writing and there is now a really good daily focus on reading and writing. On this visit groups of pupils were working with a range of adults all around the school with a strong focus on writing which is good, but you are right to continue to look for schools that have raised the quality of pupils' writing significantly. Some teachers have been on an 'improving teaching' course and this is having a positive impact on teaching across the school. Plans to introduce more classroom based information and communications technology are likely to help promote writing and these must progress as a matter of urgency. Increased consistency in the effectiveness of teachers' marking has not been tackled with sufficient urgency.

Governors are ambitious for the school and have a stronger understanding of their roles. For example, they are prepared to hold you to account for the school's performance and are keen to work with you to improve the capacity leadership in the school.

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

External support

As a small school, external support is needed. The school is part of a Colchester consortium of schools and personal links have been made at leadership level. These links could usefully be extended so that teachers plan with teachers from other schools. The local authority is planning a stock take day in the spring term. The authority's representative has agreed to find ways of providing additional help for the school's leadership. You have attended an Ofsted requiring improvement conference.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector