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14 March 2013

Mr C Metcalfe
The headteacher
Cockerton Church of England Primary School
Newton Lane
Cockerton
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 9EX

Dear Mr Metcalfe

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Cockerton C of E Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the English and mathematics subject leaders, five members of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority. The school action plans were evaluated alongside records of recent monitoring of teaching and learning.

Context

Since the inspection there have been no staff changes but the deputy headteacher has increased her teaching commitment. Nearly half of the Governing Body are newly appointed.

Main findings

Senior leaders have made a slow start in moving the school from requires improvement to good, despite much work being carried out by senior leaders and staff. This is mainly because the action plan that has been drawn up is not fit for purpose as it is insufficiently focused on the actions that will bring about improvement. It is too long and complicated and there are no timely milestones by which senior leaders and the governing body can measure the impact of the actions on pupils' progress. Some success has been made in implementing a new marking scheme across the school. Teachers are very keen to improve their practice and have welcomed the changes made so far but the plan in place covers too many initiatives at the same time. Senior leaders need to prioritise their actions and adopt a more focused approach to improving pupils' progress and monitoring learning across the school.

Senior leaders also need a clearer view of how to develop the leadership skills of other leaders within the school. This also needs to ensure that these staff have sufficient management time to enable them to fully contribute to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. There are no plans in place yet which draw upon the good practice that already exists within the school.

The Governing Body has been strengthened and all vacancies have now been filled. An experienced governor has been co-opted to support the work of the Chair and Vice Chair. Through the local diocese, personnel have been brokered to support Governing Body developments and training. Governors have begun to audit their skills and there are plans for future training, especially for newly appointed governors.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and current plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. HMI will visit again and the school should take immediate action to:

- revise and prioritise the actions within the school plan to include: clear actions for improvement linked to the areas outlined in the recent inspection report and ensure these are specific, measurable and include timely milestones linked to improving pupils' progress
- work with the local authority to identify a partner school that can support senior leaders to make improvements in the way teaching and learning are monitored
- Strengthen leadership capacity by finding time for leaders, other than the head and deputy, to develop their leadership skills and share good practice in teaching and learning across the school.

External support

The school has received varying degrees of external support. Local authority personnel have been into school to support senior leaders in monitoring teaching and learning and middle leaders in understanding data on pupils' progress. The diocese has provided personnel to strengthen and support developments to the Governing Body. The local authority has also supported the school by supplying the services of a local outstanding headteacher. Unfortunately, this support has been hampered because the action plan is not targeted tightly enough on addressing the school's weaknesses and therefore it has not been as effective as it could have been.

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

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost

Her Majesty's Inspector