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21 June 2013

Glenn Pollard
Headteacher
Horton Kirby Church of England Primary School
Horton Road
Dartford
DA4 9BN

Dear Mr Pollard

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Horton Kirby Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 June, 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 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher, a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body. The Ofsted action plan and a range of other school documentation were evaluated. This included the draft improvement plan for the year ahead, evidence of the monitoring of teaching and learning and data relating to pupils' attainment and progress. The most recent headteacher's report to governors and minutes of recent governing body meetings were also scrutinised. You and the deputy headteacher took me on a tour of the school.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, the governing body had neither a Chair nor a Vice-Chair of Governors in post. Both of these vacancies have now been filled.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors are committed to securing school improvement. However the headteacher, deputy headteacher Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors are all inexperienced, or relatively inexperienced, in their roles. A number of actions have been taken that are making a positive difference. Nevertheless, there has been an insufficiently well-planned or co-ordinated approach to improvement and as a result the way ahead is unclear. Actions taken to date have been piecemeal and overall have had too little impact on raising standards.

The action plan stemming from the previous inspection is poorly developed. It does not provide sufficient detail to be used as a tool to drive systematic improvement across the school. There is not enough information about the actions to be taken, about who is to lead them or about who is monitoring progress, how or when. No reference is made to the involvement of governors in the plan.

Pockets of improvement can be identified. For example, links have been arranged with an outstanding school and teachers are being given opportunities to work alongside highly skilled teachers. Some teachers are participating in local authority training designed to raise the quality of teaching and the marking of pupils' workbooks throughout the school is more consistent. Systems for reviewing pupils' progress and for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning have been reviewed and these are now taking place with appropriate frequency.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have attended a number of training courses relating to personnel and safeguarding matters as well as to the improvement of systems for managing pupils' tracking data. However, there has not been sufficient focus on developing high quality leadership that raises the quality of teaching and secures faster progress for pupils.

To date there has been no external review of governance, although this is now booked. The new Chair and Vice Chair of Governors have highly relevant skills and evident determination to bring to these roles. However, as yet, neither has a sound understanding of the breadth of the role or of the skills they need to develop. During this monitoring visit, the Chair of the Governing Body was unaware of the existence of the new action plan. Neither the most recent headteacher's report to the governing body, nor the minutes of that meeting make any reference to the previous inspection nor to the subsequent plan or progress being made towards carrying out the recommendations in the inspection report.

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

- work with the support of the local authority to review the responsibilities of the school senior leaders and governors, so that their roles relating to securing school improvement are clearly defined
- work with the local authority to strengthen the school action plan ensuring the role of governors is clearly indicated
- develop further the leadership skills of the headteacher and deputy headteacher through participation in leadership training
- develop further the leadership skills of the governing body through accessing training as indicated through the review of governance
- ensure that the local authority, senior leaders and governors meet regularly on a formal basis to review progress against the action plan and determine new priorities as appropriate.

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

External support

There is a discrepancy between the reports from the school and the local authority regarding the quantity and quality of support offered to the school. The school does not consider that they have been well supported. The local authority accepts that the impact of support to date, including brokered links with a successful local school, has been limited. During this monitoring visit the local authority agreed to significantly increase the level of support with immediate effect. 'Progress and impact meetings' will be held every six weeks. The Chair of the Governing Body is receiving high quality, helpful and informative support from an experienced Chair of Governors at a local school.

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

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector