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10 September 2013

Mrs Cathy Walker
Executive headteacher
Newington Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Newington
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME9 7LB

Dear Mrs Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Newington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 September 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 May 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:

- ensure its action plan sets out more systematically how each of the areas for improvement identified in its last inspection is being tackled and the pace at which this is to be done
- make sure the action plan is clearer about what training staff can expect and how this is expected to raise standards
- ensure governors check more independently how well the school is making progress with key actions to improve teaching
- ensure pupil tracking systems enable staff to check more easily how well pupils are progressing towards their targets.

Evidence

During the visit I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan. I visited each classroom to see the school at work and spoke to pupils about their work.

Context

Since the school was inspected in May 2013 three teachers (one full time and two part time) have left and been replaced. A specialist physical education teacher has been appointed to teach across the school for two days per week. Key Stage 2 classes have been reorganised so there are now three mixed age classes rather than one mixed age and two single age classes.

Main findings

Together with the Head of School you have acted quickly to start improving the school. You are determined to move the school forward and the staff team understands the need for change, and supports you.

The school action plan focuses on the right areas but needs to be more clearly structured to show how each area for improvement mentioned in the inspection report is being tackled. There is a well thought out programme of staff training and you know what you want to achieve but the plan is not clear enough about how actions to improve teaching will raise standards for pupils.

There has already been some useful staff training to develop teaching. As a result teachers are clearer about what they are expected to include in their planning and marking. Despite the fast pace of change there is a positive approach from the staff team because teachers feel they are more involved in making decisions. During the visit teachers were already trying out new ideas discussed the previous week. For example, using the newly developed Bronze, Silver, Gold system to show pupils three levels of performance and encourage all pupils to aim for Gold!

Subject leaders for English and mathematics are ready to lead the rest of the staff team and support them as required. You have sensibly restructured their leadership time so they can use it more flexibly according to need. They are committed to the changes planned to improve teaching but like you, realise the necessity to plan the pace of change carefully so that staff are not overloaded. They have a good understanding of how to check if changes are working and know they need to do this more regularly than they have in the past.

You have rightly decided to meet more often with teachers to see how well pupils are doing. Currently the information collected about each pupil tells teachers how much progress they are making but does not show if they need to make more progress to catch up with where they should be. The Inclusion Manager is looking carefully to see which additional small group work is most effective to support pupils to catch up, and help teachers to plan accordingly. However, it is too early to see how well this is working.

Necessitated by pupil numbers, your allocation of pupils to mixed age classes in Key Stage 2 was carefully thought through and explained to parents. A benefit of the new arrangements is the opportunity, which staff are capitalising on, for shared planning across the Key Stage 2 team.

The governors are very committed to improving the school and use data about pupil performance well to check standards. However they are too reliant on the reports you and the Head of School provide about other aspects of the school's work, particularly the quality of teaching.

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

The local authority has rightly allocated additional support to the school since the last inspection. Training has already started to help teachers to develop key aspects of their work but this is too recent to show any impact. You are awaiting dates for further support which need to be agreed quickly so they can be included in the plans for the terms ahead. Training should continue to be matched closely to the school's identified priorities for improving teaching.

You are developing suitable links with other schools to support you. I am pleased you are taking advantage of training opportunities for teachers and working with senior leaders from different schools to check your judgements about the quality of teaching and learning at the school are accurate. It is too early to see how effective this work is.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector