

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566855
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
gail.hill@cfbt.com



2 October 2013

Mrs Sally Hobson
Headteacher
Bedlington Whitley Memorial Church of England First School
Gordon Terrace
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 5DE

Dear Mrs Hobson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bedlington Whitley Memorial Church of England First School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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 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:

- refine targets and develop milestones within the school development plan so that leaders, including governors, can more easily measure the impact of the school's work
- support governors in developing their knowledge and skills to enable them to evaluate the impact of the school's actions and to challenge leaders fully
- ensure that the local authority provides more effective support for the headteacher and newly appointed deputy headteacher with their work to hold teachers more fully to account for the progress pupils make.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, the chair and two other members of the governing body, and with a representative of the local authority. I undertook a tour of the school with the leaders of Key Stages 1 and 2, evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised a range of documents including a sample of pupils' work.

Context

There have been a number of changes to the school's staffing since the inspection. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed along with an Early Years Foundation Stage leader and a Year 4 teacher. A new Early Years Foundation unit is under construction and will open in January 2014. The governors have set up a steering group, which includes representatives of the local authority and the diocese, to oversee improvement work in the school but this is yet to meet.

Main findings

The headteacher has prepared a very detailed action plan linked to each of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The plan contains a range of strategies to tackle each of the areas for improvement linked to success criteria by which they should be measured. However, milestones for completion are not clear and the school has accepted that it needs to develop these as a matter of urgency to ensure that progress in each area can be monitored by both senior leaders and governors.

Evidence gathered during this visit demonstrates that the school has made a positive start in beginning to meet many of the targets in the plan although much is at a relatively early stage. For example, the headteacher has deepened her understanding of effective phonics teaching by observing high quality practice in successful partner schools. Staff training in the teaching of phonics is planned for all teachers later in the term. Systems to improve how the school tracks the attainment and progress of all pupils and groups of pupils have improved and this information is enabling teachers to plan more effective lessons in which activities better match the needs of all pupils.

The school's governors are highly supportive of the work of the school and visit on a regular basis. They are not yet fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and a recent audit of their capabilities has shown where they need further training and support to equip them with the skills they need to undertake this work. Governors are clearly committed to developing their own skills so that they can hold leaders to account for the impact of their work. The local authority has agreed to provide training in how governors can interpret school data and understand more fully the impact of teaching on the progress of pupils. A governors' steering group has been established to regularly monitor the impact of the actions contained in the action plan but the group has not yet met.

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 was aware of some of the areas for improvement identified at the inspection but has only just begun to offer support to the school to tackle these. A governors' skills audit has been carried out and the authority will provide governor training later this term. The local authority and diocese will also be represented on the new governors' steering group.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland and the Director of Education for the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector