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11 October 2013

Mrs Julia Norton
Consultant Headteacher
Thorner Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Kirkhills
Thorner
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS14 3JD

Dear Mrs Norton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorner Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Leeds

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 July 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 the better communication emerging between staff, leaders and governors is embedded in systems and procedures, so that all continue to know how well the school is doing and all can be effective in getting the school to good.
- support those teachers who need help to plan and deliver lessons that will challenge and accelerate learning for the most able.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated. We visited lessons to look at some of the changes implemented since the inspection. We looked at the 2013 progress and attainment data for each year group and other documents related to it.

Context

During the substantive headteacher's absence, a consultant headteacher has been appointed to lead and manage the school and support the newly appointed deputy headteacher. The deputy headteacher is teaching in Key Stage 2 and there has been some movement of teachers between year groups since the inspection.

Main findings

The school has produced an incisive action plan, which focuses clearly on the areas for improvement and the school's own recent evaluation of barriers to success. The involvement of all staff and governors in the improvement planning process, and the well thought through actions have ensured all staff know their role in getting the school to good. The milestones for progress are easily measurable ensuring all staff and governors understand what is to be achieved and in what time. Consequently, they are more able to make accurate checks on the school's progress. The monitoring and review cycle is rigorous and further demonstrates the school's commitment to getting to good quickly. The knowledge and skills of the consultant Headteacher, and her leadership style, have allowed the school to make changes quickly and effectively. The new deputy headteacher has provided a much-needed link between the staff and the headteacher. Senior leaders are in regular contact with the substantive headteacher, at her request. She has supported the writing of the action plan and kept up-to date with the school's progress. This should ensure a smooth transition of leadership on her return and provide consistency and continuity in the journey to good.

The school is now making rapid progress with actions after a short period of denial. Because middle leaders were charged with analysing the end of year data for each year group, they could clearly see the inconsistencies in achievement in Key Stage 2. They described this, as having their 'eyes opened'. They say that senior leaders have 'empowered' them and they are very clear about what they must do to ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. There has been a tangible and positive shift in the way all leaders are tackling improvements and the work that the substantive headteacher began prior to the inspection is now moving at a pace.

Staff have a much better understanding of where pupils are at and what needs to be done because they are now more involved in the analysis of pupils' achievement. There is a thorough analysis of data, which is informing strategic decision-making, teaching and learning. Leaders recognise they still have work to do on embedding the use of assessment in day-to-day teaching and matching work to the learning needs of individuals and groups. Our visit to classrooms showed some tangible improvements in this aspect. However, it is clear that learners, who are more able, are challenged to make better progress within lessons quickly. Leaders have planned to move to half-termly progress reviews in order to address underachievement swiftly and more regularly.

Carefully planned and individual support plans for teachers have promoted self- reflection and evaluation. These are helping teachers to focus on what they need to do to accelerate learning and progress for all pupils. They value the support and training provided, as well as the opportunity to observe good and outstanding practice in other schools. They know what leaders expect of them and are committed to improving their teaching and outcomes for pupils.

Governors now fully know and understand the school's position. They have been proactive in evaluating their own contributions to school improvement. From this, they have devised their own action plan, which has clear links to the school's post Ofsted action plan.

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 is providing timely and appropriate support. The brokering of the consultant headteacher has ensured the school is firmly on its journey to good. Links have been brokered with partner schools to support improvements in teaching, learning and middle leadership. The School Improvement Adviser is playing a full and active role in the school's development plan by undertaking regular monitoring visits and leading staff training.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Bowyer

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Director of Education for the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds
- Mrs Helen Storey Senior Her Majesty's Inspector
- The Lead Inspector