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Mr Mark Lawn
Headteacher
Baldersby St James Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Baldersby St James
Thirsk
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Lawn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Baldersby St James Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, North Yorkshire

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- Improve the progress all pupils make in lessons, and especially less able pupils and pupils in the Key Stage 2 class, by ensuring that:
 - teachers' planning always makes it clear what pupils are expected to learn
 - each pupil knows exactly what is to be achieved in each lesson
 - individual pupils' progress is assessed against the targets set for the lesson
 - pupils receive appropriate instruction and support to help them to learn to spell accurately.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring regular communication between the headteacher, governing body, local authority and the partners providing support takes place so that all are clear about the difference that training and support is intended to have and the process for checking its impact.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, pupils, the Chair of Governors and representatives of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with the headteacher of the partner school, Dacre Braithwaite Primary School. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Records pertaining to pupils' attainment and progress, checks on the quality of teaching and the performance management of teachers were scrutinised. Four lessons were observed of which three were jointly observed with the headteacher.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the headteacher's hours have reduced from full time to leading the school for four days a week. A senior teacher manages the school for one day per week.

Main findings

The headteacher's revisions to the school improvement plan have added further detail and information. Priorities are clear and the regular updates and colour coding enable staff and governors to quickly check that actions have taken place and what is next. The inclusion of fixed milestones would greatly strengthen the plan and aid governors in identifying clearly whether developments to improve teaching and learning are moving swiftly or falling behind.

Governors are rightly concerned that the pace of improvement has slowed and are not receiving timely reports about the difference that training and external support is intended to have and the process for checking its impact.

Despite much activity to improve teaching and the quality of school leaders' monitoring in the six months since the school was inspected, many pupils continue to make slow progress in lessons. This is because teachers' planning is overly focused on recording the tasks pupils will work on but does not make clear precisely what they are expected to learn. Insufficient checks during lessons mean teachers do not quickly spot when pupils are ready to move on, when misconceptions arise, or work-rate slows and off-task chatter increases. A notable exception, observed during this visit, was the well-planned numeracy work in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. This work was pitched accurately to the different needs of this wide age-range and ability group and ensured appropriate challenge and support so that each pupil concentrated well and developed their measuring skills. This example of good teaching ensured pupils understood the concepts involved in calculating the difference between the weights of two different objects before they moved on to independent work solving various weighing problems.

Checks of pupils' books shows that marking and feedback to pupils about their work is taking place more systematically than at the previous monitoring visit. This does not always help pupils to improve subsequent work. Actions to improve written work have concentrated on presentation but insufficient attention is given to develop the technical aspects of punctuation and grammar. Spelling is poor particularly in Key Stage 2 and too little support is given to help pupils to develop effective strategies to spell common and tricky words.

Monitoring of teaching by the headteacher, and on occasion, by literacy and numeracy leaders and governors, has focussed on teachers practice and the progress they are making to incorporate new approaches, for example, in using classroom displays, presentation and literacy circles. While it is clear from these checks that pupils are enjoying lessons and are motivated by such developments any impact on their learning and progress is understated in monitoring records. The contribution that each teacher must make to raising attainment and pupils' progress is not reflected clearly enough in performance targets or in the current appraisal processes.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI will return to the school next term to carry out a further monitoring visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to meet with the full governing body, to review teaching and the monitoring of its impact on pupils' learning.

External support

External support has not had the impact that the authority's plan anticipated. Much of the support provided to the school has come from a partnership arranged by the local authority with the headteacher of Dacre Braithwaite Primary school and through a programme of specialist advice and support to assist teachers in improving aspects of teaching. Governors are not clear about the difference that this support is having and the arrangements for reporting and checking its impact are not clear to the partners providing support. Although clear recommendations are made by those providing training much of this has taken place recently and is not yet impacting upon pupils' attainment and progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Gina White

Her Majesty's Inspector