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Mrs Gillian Tawse
Acting Headteacher
Corbridge Church of England Aided First School
St Helen's Lane
Corbridge
Northumberland
NE45 5JQ

Dear Mrs Tawse

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Corbridge Church of England Aided First School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 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 September 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:

- urgently increase the capacity of the senior leadership team in order to drive improvements within the school at a greater pace
- 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
- establish a governors' steering group, including representatives of the local authority and the diocese, to oversee improvement work in the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and a middle leader, two members of the governing body, and with representatives of the local authority and the diocese. I evaluated the school improvement plan and led a discussion on school improvement with the staff.

Context

At the time of the monitoring inspection visit the substantive headteacher had been absent from the school since November 2012. Since then an interim headteacher followed by a part-time acting headteacher have led the school. The current acting headteacher has been recently seconded from a successful primary school to lead the school on a full-time basis.

Main findings

At the time of the monitoring inspection visit the acting headteacher had been in post for one week. In this short time she has rapidly prepared a detailed action plan linked to each of the areas for improvement identified at the inspection. The plan contains a range of strategies to tackle each area for improvement and the success criteria by which they should be measured. However, milestones for completion are not clear and at present the plan is too dependent on the sole leadership of the acting headteacher. Middle leaders should be given responsibility for leading and monitoring areas of improvement and need to take a more active role in checking on standards and driving forward improvements in teaching and learning. For example, the school is aware that assessment information must be used more effectively by teachers to ensure lesson activities match the needs of all pupils but currently lacks the capacity to rapidly drive this initiative throughout the school. Governors and the local authority intend to increase the capacity of the school leadership by appointing an aspiring senior leader from a partner school in the near future.

The school governing body has been reorganised and the new chair and vice-chair have taken decisive action to improve the rigour with which they hold senior leaders to account for the school's performance. The governing body is better informed about the work of the school and is now in a much better position to challenge both the school and the support provided by the local authority.

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 acting headteacher has rapidly brokered significant support from the Tyne Valley Teaching School Alliance and from the Cramlington Teaching School Alliance in the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report including data analysis and target setting, the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make), and developing the skills of the governing body. The local authority has agreed to change the attached school adviser to one known to the acting headteacher and a system has been established to regularly monitor the progress of the school's work.

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