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Mr Andrew Day (Executive Director)
Northumberland Church of England Academy
Academy Road
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 9FZ

Dear Mr Day

Following my visit to your academy on 3 February 2014, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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 academy should take further action to:

- ensure that the academy's improvement plan continues to focus on the areas for improvement and is regularly and carefully monitored to judge the impact of this work on pupils' progress
- ensure that the external review of governance is carried out and that and that actions from this are rapidly progressed.

During the visit, meetings were held with the executive director and the four principal directors, three members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plans were evaluated along with the action plan to improve governance. I undertook brief tours of the secondary, primary and special school areas of the Josephine Butler site with pupils to evaluate their views about provision in the academy.

Context

There have been a small number of changes to the academy's staffing since the inspection. New directors for English and for the foundation stage have been appointed. There is a new Chair of Governors and governors now visit the academy and meet more regularly. An external review of governance has been arranged during the spring term.

Main findings

The executive director and other senior leaders have responded positively to the areas for improvement identified at the recent inspection. Actions in place prior to the inspection have been strengthened and sharpened and the pace of improvement has been accelerated. An improved system to monitor and track pupils' progress towards more challenging targets has been developed and is beginning to raise expectations about what pupils can achieve, as well as allowing more timely and effective interventions to take place to support underachieving pupils. The academy is aware that this information must now be used more effectively by teachers to ensure lesson activities match the needs of all pupils.

More frequent monitoring of teaching by senior leaders is giving a clearer indication of the quality of teaching and a structured programme of training and support for teachers and middle leaders is now in place. Leaders have begun a review of the primary curriculum and the directors for literacy and numeracy are working to embed best practice throughout all areas of the academy.

The academy's governors are now better informed about its work. They visit the academy on a more regular basis and the focus and records of governor visits have been sharpened. A standards committee meets every half term and receives updates from middle leaders on the progress of their improvement work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Academy leaders have rapidly brokered a significant range of external support in the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. A large number of staff are taking part in the outstanding teachers programme organised by the Cramlington Teaching School Alliance and senior and middle leaders are receiving support from the North East Teaching Schools' Partnership. The academy has extensive links with a number of secondary and primary schools both locally and nationally and is using these partnerships to provide support where appropriate. It is, however, too early to detect the impact of much of this work. An external review of governance has been arranged for later in spring term.

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

Yours sincerely

David Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector