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February 3 2014

Mrs Karen O'Brien
Headteacher
Holy Trinity Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Trinity Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA12 1LU

Dear Mrs O'Brien

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holy Trinity Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 November 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:

- strengthen the success criteria within the school action plan to include more challenging and specific targets for year groups and groups of pupils so that everyone knows exactly what is expected
- include milestones within the action plan so that progress towards goals can easily be checked
- ensure the role of governors is clarified in the plan so they use it more rigorously to check how well the school is doing
- develop links with good and outstanding schools to benefit from good practice.

Evidence

During the visit I held meetings with you, middle level leaders and the chair of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited each classroom to see the school at work. I evaluated the school action plan. I spoke to a representative of the local authority prior to the visit.

Context

Since the inspection the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Leader has resigned. A teacher already working in the school is covering the post on a temporary basis. A new, purpose-built classroom block has been opened for key stage 1.

Main findings

You and the staff were initially deflated by the outcome of the inspection in November 2013. Since then you have rallied the team and have developed a common understanding of accountability. You have shared the school action plan with all staff and are now ready to move forward and put in place the improvements needed to move the school to 'good'. The staff are right behind you.

Your action plan focuses on the right areas and tackles these in a logical sequence. It does not include measurable outcomes and what you expect to see at each step which makes it hard for senior leaders and governors to know how well the school is doing.

You are keen to develop an emphasis on learning across the school. Teachers are more involved in constructive professional conversations about their teaching. There is a focus on progress: pupils are starting to talk about what they are learning instead of what they are doing. Liaison between teachers has improved and there is a growing understanding that through sharing expertise and ideas the team will become stronger. It is early days but the team is pulling together well.

Your group of middle level leaders is inexperienced and they have had a steep learning curve since the inspection: they are rising well to the challenge. They have enthusiastically embarked on training such as 'Effective Classroom Observation' to help them in their role. You sensibly intend to build on this through joint lesson observations so that everyone is in agreement about what they are looking for in a 'good' lesson. I am pleased you intend to work with other schools to develop this and urge you to take every opportunity to benefit from good practice elsewhere.

These middle level leaders are helping to drive the action plan by holding regular meetings with staff to guide and support them. For example, your literacy leader has worked with teachers to develop lesson plans for reading and writing. You use teachers' views, linked to information from lesson observations, effectively to

determine what help teachers need to improve. Middle level leaders report they can already see recent training in good questioning being used well in lessons.

You have rightly increased class teachers' accountability for each and every pupil. Teachers are more aware of their part within the whole school in making sure no child falls behind: they understand this cannot be left to Year 6 teachers. You target your regular meetings with teachers carefully to check how well pupils are doing and put interventions in place where pupils need to catch up. You have recently grouped older pupils according to ability in Literacy lessons although it is too early to see how well this is working.

Your new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage has already taken on board advice from the local authority and has made improvements, for example providing more opportunities for children to practise writing. The Early Years Foundation Stage is much more part of the whole school team: staff are working constructively with others across the school to ensure they prepare children well for the next stage in their learning.

The school action plan rightly identifies a link governor for each key area but the role of all governors in monitoring the work of the school is not clear enough. Governors are too reliant on the reports you provide about the school's work and do not plan enough opportunities to check this for themselves.

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 has provided effective support to help the school. In particular the bespoke package of training for school leaders has been useful to sharpen strategic thinking and lesson observation skills. Advice from the Early Years Foundation Stage consultant has helped the new leader to develop good practice in the nursery and reception classes.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector