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Mrs Alison Hall
Headteacher
Washingwell Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Washingwell Community Primary School, Gateshead

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 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:

- include measurable targets and achievement data for all groups of pupils in the school's raising achievement plan so that pupils' progress can be checked by leaders and governors more readily
- improve leaders' skills in checking and evaluating the work in their areas of responsibility and make sure written feedback to teachers from lesson observations is evaluative rather than descriptive
- make sure that more governors find out for themselves how well pupils are learning through first-hand visits to the school and ensure any challenge to school leaders is fully recorded in the minutes of governors meetings.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you, other senior and subject leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's raising achievement plan and looked at a range of documents including samples of pupils' work, minutes of governing body meetings and the outcomes of monitoring activities. You accompanied me on a tour of the school.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2013, there have been no changes to staffing or governance.

Main findings

You, other leaders and governors are showing by your actions a determination to ensure that the school improves. Together, you have produced a well-targeted 'raising achievement plan' to address the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection report. The activities in the plan are appropriate and rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and leadership and management. However, while there are clear milestones and targets for pupils' achievement in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6, the plan does not contain milestones and measurable targets for other groups of pupils, although this information is available in other documents. This limits the extent to which leaders and governors can check on pupils' progress.

Subject and other leaders are beginning to improve their skills in checking and evaluating the work in the subjects or areas for which they are responsible. Monitoring records show they are conducting lesson observations and learning walks but their written feedback to teachers is often descriptive of what is happening in the lesson, rather than evaluative in respect of what pupils are learning. Leaders are now more involved in conducting scrutinies of pupils' work and reviewing teachers' planning. By providing useful feedback to staff this is helping them improve. As a result, pupils' books show that the quality of marking and feedback is getting better. There is increasing evidence to show where pupils' are responding to marking because they are now receiving clearer guidance on how to improve their work. It is also evident that pupils are taking more care with their handwriting and in the presentation of their work.

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school because they are well-informed through the headteacher's reports to the governors. They have recently established four committees which focus on pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching, behaviour and safety and leadership and management and there are now 'link governors' for example, to check on the work of literacy and numeracy leaders. Some governors have conducted learning walks to see how well the school is doing in their particular area of responsibility. However, it has not yet been possible for all governors to visit the school to see for themselves how well pupils are learning. Minutes of governing body meetings do not always reflect the level of challenge which governors now offer to the school's leaders.

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

A local authority steering group meets on a regular basis to challenge the school to improve. Support is being provided by the headteacher of Glynwood Primary School, who became the School Improvement Partner last term, to help leaders to develop their skills in checking the work in the subjects or areas for which they are responsible. This support includes opportunities for leaders and staff to visit Glynwood Primary School to observe good practice, particularly in teaching. The School Improvement Partner is also providing training for governors on how to analyse school data so they are better placed to ask challenging questions about pupils' achievement. Literacy and numeracy consultants from the local authority are now working with staff and leaders to help improve the quality of teaching in these areas.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Gateshead local authority.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector