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7 March 2014

Mr Ian Railton
Headteacher
St Aidan's CofE Memorial Primary School
Loyalty Road
Hartlepool
County Durham
TS25 5BA

Dear Mr Railton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Aidan's CofE Memorial Primary School, Hartlepool

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 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 and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- Review the roles and responsibilities of the three senior leaders, currently non-class based, to focus more effectively on bringing about rapid improvement in pupils' progress across the school; especially for those pupils making less than expected progress and more-able pupils.
- Take action to ensure that the governing body holds the headteacher and senior leaders to account for the impact of the actions they initiate and help the headteacher, in particular, to develop a clearer direction for the future of the school which will move it more rapidly towards a good judgement at its next inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, three senior leaders, members of the governing body, newly appointed staff and a telephone conversation with the School Improvement Partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. All new members of staff were observed teaching and some in joint observations with the headteacher. The work in pupils' books and teachers' assessments were scrutinised alongside the schools'

own data on pupils' progress.

Context

Since my last visit the headteacher and the governing body took the decision to remove three senior leaders from the classroom specifically to develop their skills in monitoring teaching and learning and to provide direct interventions to quicken improvements in pupils' progress across the school. These teachers were replaced by three newly qualified teachers and two other experienced teachers who joined the school in September 2013.

Main findings

The headteacher and the governing body's actions have not moved the school forward quickly enough towards achieving a good overall effectiveness judgement at the next inspection. The initiative, involving the change of senior leader role, has not brought about the anticipated rapid improvements in pupils progress. The headteacher has not given enough direction or steer in what he expects of them to the senior leaders and consequently they have not worked closely enough with the pupils who have the greatest need. While senior leaders have successfully established a new system for tracking the progress of pupils and groups across the school the information gleaned from this process is not being collected regularly enough to catch underachievement early. Consequently, interventions are not implemented quickly and underachievement persists longer than it should. There has however been effective work carried out to support newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school to settle in and to improve teaching and learning.

The headteacher has delegated responsibilities more widely across the senior leadership team but has failed to have a clear rationale for doing so; and he has not held these staff to account closely enough for the progress of pupils. Consequently, too many pupils across the school are still not making expected progress. There has been a lack of synergy between the gathering of assessment data, the analysis of the data and the actions taken to improve the progress of identified pupils. Furthermore, assessments carried out to assess how well pupils are learning are not applied consistently across the school. Some teachers are using these assessments frequently, as a tool to tell them what pupils need to do next and then planning learning accordingly, but this is not the case in all classes.

The governing body are aware of this lack of progress but have failed to challenge or hold the headteacher to account sufficiently. Consequently, senior leaders have been left to work out their own schedules without clear direction from the headteacher and therefore their work has not been as effective as it should have been. Current staffing levels are not sustainable financially over the long term and the headteacher has not yet drawn up plans for the staffing structure for the next academic year.

External support

The school and senior leaders have accessed a raft of appropriate support from both the local authority and Ofsted seminars. The local authority has attended all focus group meetings and has steered the governing body in the right direction to develop their skills in monitoring the work of the school. Unfortunately, this training has yet to have the expected impact on improving all pupils' progress to good or moving the school forward quickly enough towards a good judgement.

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

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost

Her Majesty's Inspector