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Mrs Judith Reay

Acting Headteacher

Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Whitfield

Hexham

Northumberland

NE47 8JH

Dear Mrs Reay

Special measures monitoring inspection of Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, a consultant headteacher working on behalf of the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle and a representative of the local authority. Brief discussions were also held with a group of staff. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

The substantive headteacher is on long-term absence and will retire at the end of the academic year. An acting headteacher has been in post since April, from the West Tyne Federation of schools, pending the current consultation for Whitfield to join this federation in July. The Key Stage 2 teacher left the school at Easter. Classes

have been covered by supply staff. A senior teacher from the West Tyne Federation will take up the substantive teaching commitment of the Early Years and Key Stage 1 class from June. The school is currently recruiting for a Key Stage 2 teacher.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

This is a school undergoing significant change. The move from First to Primary school status, the instability in leadership and staffing and the disappointment about the outcome of the February inspection have, together, prevented as rapid and effective a start as is needed in addressing the fundamental issues of day-to-day practice. Both the school action plan and the local authority statement of action lack the clarity, specificity and accountability mechanisms needed to address with the necessary urgency the overarching issues affecting the school. The school does not yet have a secure enough direction towards the removal of special measures.

Plans to form a hard federation, first proposed before the inspection, are now reaching their conclusion so that long-term leadership can be secured. The recruitment of a senior teacher has gone some way in addressing immediate staffing issues and the process of recruiting an additional teacher for the Key Stage 2 class is currently underway. It is crucial that greater thought be given to the support this teacher will receive, once in post, given the inexperience of the school and wider federation in teaching a Year 6 cohort of pupils.

An effective system for tracking pupils' progress has yet to be implemented. Consequently, assessment information is not being used to best effect. In addition, assessment has not been moderated by an external partner, for example, the local authority. While improvement plans include actions to tackle some of these weaknesses, they do not go far enough in detailing which actions should take priority, or stating clear measures of success over time. The school action plan is not a useful tool for driving school improvement.

Governance is in a state of flux. Current governors acknowledge that they require training to undertake their role effectively. However, over time, they have not been well supported by the school, local authority or diocese in addressing their specific weaknesses, especially in understanding pupils' achievement in relation to national benchmarks. Timely and tailored support is now urgently required if governors are to hold senior leaders to account for improvements in pupils' achievement.

A steering group has quickly convened under the direction of the local authority. Its constitution is agreed, including representatives from governance, the local authority and the diocese. However, the terms of reference for how this group will work are not sufficiently clear.

The local authority's statement of action lacks clarity about the involvement, responsibility and accountability of key stakeholders. There are many separate sources of support that are not being effectively coordinated for maximum benefit to the school. Uncertainty about the divisions of responsibility and accountability is preventing the delivery of a coherent package of support that the school so urgently requires.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Services for Northumberland and the Director of Education for the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston
Her Majesty's Inspector