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Ms Anne Graham
Headteacher
Cockton Hill Infant School
McIntyre Terrace
Cockton Hill
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
DL14 6HW

Dear Ms Graham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cockton Hill Infant School, Durham

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

- improve the quality of marking and feedback to ensure there are specific comments to help pupils improve the quality of their work. In addition, make sure pupils have enough opportunities to respond to adults' comments.
- seek support for governors from another governing body to share good practice and further develop governor's skills in checking and evaluating the work of the school.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior and subject leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and the headteacher of Toft Hill Primary School to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school improvement plan and looked at a range of evidence including minutes of governing body meetings, reports from the local authority, information on pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, which had a particular focus on evaluating pupils' behaviour.

Context

Since the inspection in February 2014, one teacher has returned from maternity leave. One teacher remains absent from school and is being covered by a long-term supply teacher. Two parent governors have left the governing body and two new parent governors have been appointed.

Main findings

You, senior leaders and governors have taken decisive action to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. There is now a sharper focus on checking and evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and you are taking prompt action to address those areas which need to be improved. This is helping to increase rates of pupils' progress, as shown in pupils' work and the school's data. The school improvement plan provides clear milestones and measurable targets, particularly in respect of reducing the gaps in achievement between boys and girls and those pupils known to be eligible for support through pupil premium and those who are not.

The impact of the actions identified in the school improvement plan is beginning to be seen.

- The close working with the headteachers of Toft Hill Primary School and Lumley Infant School and representatives of the local authority is having a positive impact in strengthening the skills of subject and other leaders. Leaders are now able to use their developing skills productively when evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Inspection evidence confirms that you, senior and subject leaders are holding teachers more to account for the quality of their teaching. Teachers are now more aware of the specific areas they need to develop and support is provided to ensure they meet their targets. These targets are followed up in the next observation or scrutiny of work.
- The school's data and pupils' work show that rates of progress are improving and gaps in performance are narrowing, particularly between boys and girls and for those pupils who are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium.
- In teaching seen during the visit, pupils were fully engaged in their learning and were very polite and courteous. Pupils confirmed that behaviour has improved since the inspection because lessons are more interesting and they have more work to do so therefore do not 'fidget' or get bored and misbehave.
- Governance is improving. Governors acted swiftly to commission a review of governance which has now taken place. Governors now have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Evidence in the minutes of governing body meetings show they are now asking more pertinent questions in order to hold leaders to account. They have produced a governor improvement plan and are keen to undergo more training to help them carry out their roles more effectively. They would benefit from an opportunity to work closely with members of another governing body in order to further develop their skills in checking and evaluating the work of the school. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was being undertaken on 2, 4 and 5 June 2014.

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's Education Development Partner and advisers have provided effective support which is helping subject and other leaders to develop their skills in checking and evaluating the work in the areas for which they are responsible. Local authority advisers have also assisted in improving the post-Ofsted action plan and organising support from Lumley Infant School to help make improvements to the quality of teaching. External support is also being provided by the headteacher and staff of Toft Hill Primary School and teachers are benefitting from opportunities to observe outstanding practice in both of these schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector