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Miss Susan Cornforth
Headteacher
Sherburn Village Primary School
Cookshold Lane
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Durham
DH6 1DU

Dear Miss Cornforth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sherburn Village Primary School, Durham

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 May 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:

- ensure the action plan includes measurable targets for all year groups so governors can check the impact of the actions being taken on the progress being made by all pupils
- embed the school's marking policy fully in the practice of all teachers, in all classes and subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and middle leader, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. You joined me when I visited every class, where we observed teaching, reviewed pupils' work books and spoke to pupils about their work. I evaluated the school improvement plan and

scrutinised additional information, including data on the progress pupils are making in all classes and recent governing body minutes.

Context

At the time of the last inspection you were the acting headteacher. You are now the substantive headteacher of this school and Sherburn Hill primary school. The two members of staff who left the school in July 2014 have been replaced. The governing body has been reconstituted and has three sub-committees; one of which crucially is the curriculum and standards committee.

Main findings

You, the deputy headteacher and governors have acted promptly to tackle the issues identified in the inspection report. The improvement plan lists the actions needed to become good and covers all of the areas identified as weaknesses. There are explicit measurable targets relating to pupil progress and attainment for the end of each Key Stage but not for other year groups or groups of pupils and this needs to be rectified.

Rapid changes made to way in which letters and sounds (phonics) are taught are making their mark. The proportion of Year 1 pupils gaining expected levels in the assessment of their skills is higher than last year. Pupils were seen to be using these skills in their lessons. School performance information, books and observations show that standards in writing and mathematics across the school are improving.

Your demand for a more consistent approach to the school's marking policy has resulted in improvements to the way in which teachers provide feedback to pupils about their work. Pupils are generally provided with good advice about how to improve their work and the steps they need to take to progress to the next level. Pupils report positively on how marking helps them understand how they are doing and appreciate the 'red-pen' time each lesson, to correct work as a result of the feedback. The good quality feedback seen in most lessons needs to be consistent in all, and extended fully to other subjects.

Whilst waiting to secure an external review of governance, governors wasted no time in conducting an audit of skills, improving the committee structure and in securing training from the local authority to improve the way they monitor and evaluate the work of the school. It is clear from discussions with you, governors and the educational development partner, that the governing body now actively check the quality of the school's work including more frequent visits to school and through improved information about the quality of teaching and pupil's progress in Year 2 and Year 6. Not enough information is provided yet to ensure governors have a good understanding of the progress of pupils in other classes and over time.

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

Following the inspection, the local authority increased the level of support and challenge provided to the school. A new education development partner was secured and the training she has provided has been beneficial in enabling middle leaders to understand and carry out their monitoring roles more effectively. The local authority has brokered, and paid for targeted support from leaders of two other schools, Wingate Infant and St Joseph's primary schools with whom you now work. You value all the support and its positive impact on such things as leadership, assessment and phonics which is contributing to the increased pace of improvement in the school, including pupils' hastening progress. You are right to be confident, inspection evidence confirms the positive impact of this support on tackling the school's weaknesses.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector