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Mrs Sarah Baillie
Headteacher
Ayios Nikolaos Primary School
BFPO 59
Cyprus

Dear Mrs Baillie

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ayios Nikolaos Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 September 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the most recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- embed new assessment processes and systems matched to the increased demands of the new curriculum
- establish an efficient clerking system for the School Governance Committee (SGC) to facilitate its effective operation.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, middle leaders, pupils, and members of the SGC including the Vice-Chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation with the school's inspector-adviser was held prior to the inspection. A number of Key Stage 2 lessons were observed, some jointly with the headteacher, and, during these, work in pupils' books was evaluated. Some pupils' work from last

year was also taken into account. A range of documentation was considered, including a recent review by Service Children's Education (SCE).

Context

Since the last visit, a teacher has been promoted to the role of Key Stage 2 leader. The teacher whose long-term absence was noted at the time of the previous monitoring inspection returned to work during the last academic year. A permanent teacher joined the staff at the beginning of this academic year.

Main findings

The school is on track to improve to good by the time of the next full inspection provided the momentum of improvement is sustained. The headteacher has established and maintained systematic, frequent and detailed monitoring of the quality of teaching. This includes lesson observations, analysis of pupils' progress and scrutiny of their books, to evaluate how well teaching is enabling pupils to learn. Careful consideration of what is working and what needs to improve has been shared with individual teachers and support provided, for example in the form of coaching, to help them make the changes needed. This has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

Improvements are evident in the well-constructed, levelled objectives for learning placed in pupils' books ready for each lesson. There is a keen emphasis on enabling pupils to understand what they are learning and how the skills they are gaining will help them, for instance, to work scientifically. Evidence gathered during this inspection concurs with a detailed review by SCE, which shows that there has been a marked improvement in the teaching of science. Pupils have more opportunities for practical scientific activities, tightly linked to the concepts being taught.

Strategies to improve the teaching of reading at Key Stage 2 have paid dividends. Training for staff, both teachers and learning support assistants, on developing pupils' understanding of the links between letters and sounds has contributed to a more structured approach to teaching reading skills. The school's assessment information shows significant gains in reading across Key Stage 2. An intensive programme to identify and close gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding of spelling showed some success last year and is being built on. However, national test results at the end of Key Stage 2, which were well below average in grammar, spelling and punctuation, indicate that there is still ground to gain in this area. Sensibly, early morning learning time is dedicated to raising standards in both reading and spelling. In other areas of the curriculum, teachers model the use of technical vocabulary and expect pupils to learn and use this accurately. For example, during a Year 4 science lesson, pupils used terms such as particles, materials, and vibrations accurately when learning about sound.

The school's marking policy is applied consistently across the school. Pupils are accustomed to responding to teachers' questions, challenges and corrections and do this diligently. Pupils' pride in their work is evident; books are neat and well presented. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were clear when spoken to, that the same high standards are expected regardless of the subject they are doing. This was evident in the books seen.

The impact of growing improvements in the quality of teaching is not uniformly apparent in pupils' achievement during the last academic year. The school's small cohorts mean that some caution is required in analysing the performance of groups. In Foundation Stage 1, the proportion of children working at the level in line with their age increased steadily during the year but the performance of boys was much weaker than that of girls. In Foundation Stage 2 and the Year 1 phonics screening, performance was well above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 1, results of the national assessments were broadly average in reading and writing, but with particular weaknesses in boys' writing. However, attainment was above average in mathematics. Results of the Key Stage 2 national tests were uneven with girls outperforming boys overall. Although not a trend in the school's performance over time, senior leaders are fully aware that outcomes for boys were generally lower than those for girls in 2015. They are taking steps to ensure that all are catered for equally well this year.

The leadership team in its current form is relatively new but has achieved a common sense of direction. New leaders are following national professional qualifications in leadership to help them develop the skills and understanding they require. The introduction of the new curriculum and an assessment system linked to this is resulting in a growing awareness of whole-school responsibility for the improvements needed.

The SGC has stepped up to its role as critical friend to the school. The creation of an executive group to monitor progress on the action plan proved productive last year. Some members of SGC have had frequent contact with the school, working with senior leaders to gather first-hand evidence of pupils' progress through, for example, looking at the work in their books. They now feel better placed to challenge as well as support leaders. Not all members have been able to be as actively involved and recent changes to postings have resulted in a number of vacancies. However, the Vice-Chair is taking action to fill these promptly. Lack of formal clerking of meetings is hindering the timely publication of minutes, making it difficult for members to keep abreast of agreed actions and timescales.

The headteacher and SGC are working to develop stronger links with parents. The headteacher represents the school at a local community group and a member of SGC has begun to offer a monthly drop-in for coffee and a chat about any concerns. At the end of the last academic year, the headteacher conducted a survey of all parents. Responses were largely positive and, where this was not the case, the headteacher followed up concerns with parents. Parents were encouraged to

respond to the Ofsted online parent survey, Parent View, for this inspection and 24 did so. All felt that their children are well looked after, feel safe at school and are taught well.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school values the support and challenge provided by SCE. This has included support for leaders, including those who lead subjects; training for teachers and learning support assistants on areas including spelling and grammar; help to increase the investigative elements in science teaching; and moderation of assessments in writing. The support has contributed well to the improvements noted above. The headteacher has managed the pace and focus of support to good effect and further support this year has been agreed to match the school's plan for improvement.

Links with other island schools continue to be productive, for instance in the development of a new assessment system linked to the new curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the SGC and the Director of Education Services, Directorate of Children and Young People, at the Ministry of Defence.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector