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18 July 2016

Ms Diane Lakey
Headteacher
Ellingham Church of England Aided First School
Ellingham
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Dear Ms Lakey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ellingham Church of England Aided First School

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2016, 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 November 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that improvement plans enable governors to evaluate the impact of actions on the progress and outcomes of pupils over time and from pupils' starting points.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I also spoke to a school improvement partner from the diocese and two representatives from the local authority to discuss

the actions taken since the previous inspection. We visited all three classes together, observing learning and reviewing pupils' work whilst there. I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, pupils' progress information and the minutes of governing body meetings held since the last inspection.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's organisation since November. Leaders are preparing for the change from a first school to a primary school in September and have appointed an additional teacher to take up post at that time.

Main findings

Despite disappointment at the judgement of requires improvement, leaders, staff and governors rose to the challenge and buckled down quickly to get on with the job of moving the school to good by the time of the next inspection.

Leaders and staff have a clearer understanding of the progress pupils are making because a detailed assessment system is being embedded that checks pupils' abilities regularly. Teachers are becoming more adept at using this information to set individual pupil targets and plan learning to move pupils on quickly from their starting points in lessons. However, there are still occasions in key stage 1 where assessment is not used well enough. As a result, pupils tackle work that is too easy or too hard for them. For example, while pupils now regularly carry out mathematical problem-solving activities that make them use their understanding of mathematics and think for themselves, problems are not challenging enough for the most able.

Opportunities for pupils to write at length have been developed in literacy and across the curriculum. This can be seen in the high-quality writing that adorns the vibrant displays across the school. However, too much topic work is carried out on pieces of paper and it is therefore hard to see progress over time in some subjects. This is not the case in science in key stage 2, where books clearly identify the interesting subjects taught and the good progress being made by pupils.

Governors wasted no time in securing the external review of their effectiveness and used the review process to audit their skills, secure training and improve their ability to question and challenge leaders. It is fortunate that they responded so quickly as the person responsible for carrying out the review took too long to provide a final report. Governors are much better informed about the school's work, and demand regular, detailed information about pupils' progress, at individual pupil, group and class level. They keep a close eye on the progress of actions in the post-Ofsted action plan. As yet, the plan does not have enough measurable outcomes against which they can check the impact on pupils' progress or the quality of teaching over time.

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 local authority appointed a new school improvement partner following the inspection. This made an immediate difference to the quality and accuracy of information to governors and the challenge and support afforded to the headteacher and middle leaders. For example, support is building middle leaders' skills in accurately evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' work. Support from the local authority early years officer has helped to improve the quality of provision there. The diocese's recent allocation of a school improvement partner to the school has had a significant impact on the organisation of the early years. The creative provision both indoors and out now provides better opportunities to energise children to develop their writing, mathematical and communication skills, in their own chosen activities as well as in teacher-led activities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Northumberland County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector