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Mrs Victoria Farby
Headteacher
Kirby Hill Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Farby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kirby Hill Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 October 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 February 2016. 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 monitoring and evaluation activities are explicit in its school improvement plans.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other leaders, and representatives of the governing body including the chair and vice-chair, to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. In addition to this, I met with an officer from the local authority. The school improvement plans and the school's system for checking pupil progress were evaluated. Other documents were scrutinised, including the outcomes of monitoring activities, reports to governors and local authority notes of visits.

Context

Since the previous inspection, children in Nursery and Reception are now being taught in an early years unit, instead of two separate classes. One teacher has returned from maternity leave and two teaching assistants have left. The school has recently appointed three new governors to replace governors who ended their term of office.

Main findings

You and your assistant headteacher have wasted no time since the previous inspection in ensuring that improvements are being made. You both have the quiet determination and ambition to improve the school rapidly and have made this clear to all staff. Consequently, the majority of staff now know, not just why changes needed to happen, but also how these changes are going to be carried out. Most are supportive of you in delivering your improvement vision.

You have worked with your leaders to develop action plans which clearly demonstrate how you are going to improve teaching and leadership. These plans incorporate all areas identified at the section 5 inspection and focus on actions which will make a strong impact. Individual action plans for English, mathematics, and challenging the most able, along with leadership and governance, link directly to a whole-school improvement and development plan. However, they do not explicitly show who will monitor it and how it will be monitored and evaluated. It is apparent that these actions are already starting to have a positive effect on standards as pupils are now making more progress than they were previously.

Leaders at all levels have received guidance and support to develop their leadership skills. Opportunities for leaders to observe the quality of teaching and learning with experienced colleagues are giving them the skills to develop their subject roles more effectively. Videoing techniques are being used by leaders and teachers to reflect on their own practice and these are starting to be used to look at each other's strengths and areas for improvement.

You and your leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching and learning much more keenly. Monitoring activities are linked directly to the school improvement priorities. No stone is left unturned as you continually address areas which need refining and improving. You have implemented a new marking policy, which you have already adapted as a result of your monitoring activities to improve it further. Similarly, you requested pupils use a 'drafting book' for writing in the summer term. Your monitoring showed that this was not working for your school. You were not able to identify easily if pupils were making enough progress in writing. Therefore, you changed this to meet the needs of your staff and your pupils, and consequently it is very clear when I looked at pupils' books that most are making rapid progress in writing.

A whole-school writing strategy is being used with much success. Teachers have received high-quality training to ensure that their subject knowledge has increased, and this is having an impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. It is clear from pupils' books that they now have opportunities to practise their writing skills, both in English and across the wider curriculum. New resources and adjustments to the English policy have given writing a high priority. Children are now enthusiastic and keen to write and this is exemplified in the higher quality of writing resulting from the 'Roald Dahl Day'. Furthermore, parents have now been 'upskilled' after a significant proportion attended a recent 'grammar night' to find out what is expected from pupils and how parents can help them at home.

Teachers are now planning stimulating mathematics lessons focusing on problem-solving and reasoning. Well-thought-out and well-planned training has been delivered to staff to ensure that key concepts are understood, and this has resulted in a much more challenging mathematics curriculum. New resources focusing more on mastering mathematics have provided opportunities for most-able pupils to deepen their learning. In addition, these pupils have participated in a regional mathematics challenge event at which they showed off their skills and understanding with huge success. Online activities for mathematics both at school and accessible at home have contributed to pupils expressing their enjoyment of this subject. Progress in mathematics is now easier to measure as teachers are spending more time ensuring that pupils grasp the concept, can apply it and master its understanding.

Governors now have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The governor review, which was carried out very promptly after the previous inspection, resulted in a refocusing on monitoring to hold leaders to account. Governors are now asking very challenging questions about standards and achievement and are not just accepting excuses. When governors recently questioned you about outcomes, they requested a monitoring visit to make further checks. In addition, you and your governors are holding all staff to account for raising standards. Very clear and detailed reports from the English, mathematics and early years leaders are giving you the ability to challenge more acutely and governors now have higher expectations of staff and do not shy away from giving difficult messages.

External support

The local authority has provided bespoke, rapid support to ensure that leaders, teachers and support staff have the skills and ability to improve their practice rapidly. Professional development, training and network meetings in English and mathematics from advisors in the local authority have had a significant impact on the progress pupils are making. This is because staff are more confident and their skills are being developed well. Officers in the local authority have monitored the effectiveness of this carefully and, as a result, they are playing a crucial role in your school's improvement journey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Church of England Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Lithgow
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector