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Charlotte Whyte
Headteacher
Ellingham Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Whyte

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ellingham Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 2017, 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 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:

- use the information gained from the monitoring of the school's work carried out by you, governors and the local authority to pinpoint precisely what teachers do well, and what else they need to do to accelerate pupils' learning and progress further
- collate the wide range of attainment and progress information you have, to illustrate clearly the progress individual pupils make from entry to exit.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. A representative of the diocese joined us to listen to the summary feedback that I shared with you and your chair of governors. The school action plan and your review of the school's effectiveness were evaluated. An opportunity to walk the school with you enabled me to see pupils at work in lessons. You also shared with me a range of documents, including pupils' work, to show how you and your colleagues are leading improvement.

Context

Since the last inspection, two teaching assistants have joined the federation of the two schools you lead. A new chair of the governing body has been appointed.

Main findings

You have acted promptly to strengthen the school's work. Detailed plans for improvement prioritise the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You are using these plans to check that the actions to improve the school are carried out within suitable timescales, and to measure the impact these actions have on raising achievement. You feel that there are no barriers preventing the school from being judged good at its next inspection.

The slow progress made by pupils in key stage 1 noted at the last inspection is being tackled effectively. Your own monitoring records, and the work seen in pupils' books, confirm that they are currently making better progress. Pupils' work showed evidence of higher expectations and improved progress, especially in extended writing since September. Pupils' spelling and grammar are reinforced through mini-tests each week, and by routinely correcting common errors identified during the marking of their work. In mathematics, staff training and additional resources for pupils to use in lessons are aiding the development of their problem-solving skills.

Our short visits to classrooms confirmed your views that pupils are fully engaged in learning and are making improved progress. Pupils worked purposefully by themselves, in small groups and with staff to develop their creative writing and mathematical understanding. Resources and displays of pupils' work make classrooms and corridors a rich, stimulating environment in which to learn.

Regular staff meetings and reviews of pupils' progress enable you and your staff to check their progress in more detail, including those known to be most able. Information gained from these meetings is used to target additional support for those who need it most, and to plan additional learning in mathematics and guided reading for pupils requiring further challenge.

Leaders responsible for literacy and for mathematics are having a greater impact on improving teaching and learning. Action plans are in place to steer improvement in their subjects. Further training has increased their understanding of assessment information and how this can be used by teachers to raise achievement.

Opportunities to analyse and compare pupils' work within school, and alongside teachers in other local schools, are giving them a clearer overview of the standards expected, and the quality of work that pupils are capable of producing.

Overall, results in national tests in 2016 showed that pupils continue to make a good start in Reception class. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development was similar to that found nationally. Results in phonics checks in Years 1 and 2 were below average. Overall, pupils did better in mathematics than in reading and writing. In key stage 2, significant gains were made in writing, leading to a much higher proportion of pupils in Year 6 meeting age-related expectations, demonstrating the work you and your staff have done to improve this area. Far fewer pupils met expectations in reading, and in their grammar, punctuation and spelling.

You collate a range of information gained from regular assessments and teachers' records of pupils' progress. This summative information is often expressed in percentages, which, due to the very small number of pupils, does not reflect fully the progress that pupils make from their different starting points.

You and your governors, and the local authority feel that the school is more effective now than it was at the time of the last inspection. However, overall outcomes achieved by pupils are not yet good. The targets set for pupils' attainment and progress this year are similar to those achieved in 2016, which were generally below average. You and your governors acknowledge the need to embed the improvements made since the inspection. You also recognise the need to accelerate this further in order to increase teachers' effectiveness, and to ensure teaching has a greater impact on the incremental progress of each pupil.

The governors' steering committee enables them to monitor more closely the progress made in tackling the priorities identified in the school's action plans. This extra scrutiny provides them with the information they need to hold you and your staff accountable for making improvements. Minutes of their meetings show that governors are both supportive and challenging. They have full confidence in you and your staff to make the necessary improvements.

External support

You have forged good relations with the local authority to improve the school. This partnership enables you to validate your views of the school's development and to corroborate your views about pupils' progress gained from your monitoring and evaluation. Further visits by the local authority are planned this year to support you and your colleagues in securing further improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector