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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Alexandra Ryder
St Hild's College Church of England Aided Primary School
Renny's Lane
Gilesgate
Durham
DH1 2HZ

Dear Mrs Ryder

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Hild's College Church of England Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 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 January 2017. 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the school on pupils' progress incisively and in a timely manner, especially in relation to reading
- review the school's calculations policy to make sure it reflects the content of the school's curriculum for mathematics accurately
- report the numbers and types of behavioural incidents to governors on a regular basis so that trends can be identified, challenged or congratulated.

Evidence

During the inspection, discussions were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, the governing body and representatives of Durham local authority and the Church of England diocese of Durham to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement planning was evaluated. In addition, you and I observed teaching and learning throughout the school together.

Context

A number of teaching staff left the school at the end of the summer term 2017. A new key stage 1 leader, who is also the Year 2 teacher, English subject leader and mentor for newly qualified teachers, took up post two days after the last inspection. Two newly qualified teachers and a new mathematics subject leader were employed to teach in Years 3, 4 and 5 respectively from the beginning of the autumn term 2017. A positive futures worker (PFW) has been employed for three days each week since September 2017.

A governor resigned following the last inspection. The governing body has been strengthened by the addition of a new foundation governor, who is also a local primary school headteacher.

Main findings

Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate. Their plans for further school improvement are focused on the correct key priorities. Leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's assessment information.

Despite significant turbulence in staffing since the last inspection, the quality of teaching is improving in all key stages. Leaders have taken effective action to improve the procedures to assess the standards reached by pupils. In addition, the progress made by individual pupils, and groups of pupils, is tracked much more systematically. The vast majority of teachers have a clear understanding of each child's skills and abilities. As a result, most teachers plan work that enables pupils to make more rapid progress from their individual starting points.

In mathematics, the deputy headteacher has led a review of the curriculum. She introduced a daily maths challenge that is sharpening pupils' rapid recall of basic number facts. Pupils' workbooks show that the majority of work in mathematics is pitched at the right level of difficulty. They do not solve all of the problems they are set correctly at the first attempt. Pupils act on their teachers' feedback and have another go. They are becoming more resilient. The deputy headteacher has scrutinised the progress made by pupils insightfully. She is aware that the school's calculations policy requires updating.

The subject leader for English has focused on improving the standard of writing

throughout the school since the inspection. For example, she has introduced new handwriting and spelling schemes of work successfully. The subject leader has also changed the ways in which reading is taught across the school. She has introduced high-quality novels to each year group, implemented whole-class reading comprehension lessons and revamped the way in which 'guided reading' is taught. Leaders have not checked on the effectiveness of these initiatives quickly enough.

The leader for the early years, working in partnership with the local authority, has developed the indoor and outdoor learning environments for the two-, three- and four-year-olds in school. Although the proportion of children who reach a good level of development increased for the third year running in 2017, the leader acknowledges that some are not ready for the demands of the Year 1 curriculum at the end of the early years. She is taking robust action to address this area for development.

The PFW has taken effective action to improve the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. More pupils have attended school every day this year than did during the same period last year. These pupils are making better progress, because they are in school more often.

Leaders make sure that all staff are trained regularly in all aspects of keeping children safe in education. The school's safeguarding records are chronological and comprehensive. However, trends in the number and types of behaviour incidents are not identified and reported to governors routinely.

External support

Governance is improving. The governing body commissioned an external review of governance in a timely manner. Governors are carrying out their support and challenge duties in accordance with the resulting action plan. Representatives from the Church of England Diocese of Durham trained members of the governing body to monitor the work of the school more effectively. A core group of governors attend regular meetings of the governors' school improvement working party. These governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require further development.

The newly appointed pupil premium governor has an increasing knowledge of the impact of the government's additional funding for disadvantaged pupils on their attainment and progress. He is acting in accordance with the recommendations contained in the external review. Disadvantaged pupils are just beginning to make more rapid progress across the school.

The local authority has supported the school well since the last inspection. Leaders, including governors, are challenged during regular meetings of the local authority's school scrutiny group. The local authority's educational development partners have supported improvements in the early years, English and mathematics well.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector