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Mrs Rachael Greenhalgh  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Greenhalgh

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Middleton Church of England Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 24 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders, the trust and the local governing body are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that teachers' planning is clear about the most important things they need to teach first so that pupils build securely on strong foundations of what they already know
- identify the knowledge and skills links between subjects and make the most of opportunities to revisit them so that pupils remember more of what they have learned over time
- ensure that the gains already made in improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics knowledge and skills continue and that these improvements are matched across the full range of subjects.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, teachers, senior leaders from the trust and members of the local governing body. We spoke about the actions taken since the previous inspection. I looked at the school's improvement plans. I also visited lessons with the executive headteacher, spoke with pupils and looked at the work in their books.

## **Context**

The executive headteacher is responsible for Middleton and for another school in the trust. There is a head of school in each centre. The relatively new local governing body works closely with trustees. They provide effective challenge and support to school leaders. Since the previous inspection, improvements to the outdoor area in early years have created popular and attractive spaces to learn.

## **Main findings**

Leaders, governors and the trust are clear about the things that the school is doing well and what else it needs to do to continue to improve. The whole-school team is determined to make a positive difference to the quality of education which the school provides. Changes are happening quickly because leaders want to make sure that all pupils in the school achieve well.

The improvements in pupils' behaviour are a big step forward since the previous inspection. The school is a happy and friendly place. Most pupils behave well because they enjoy their learning. Teachers can get on with their teaching because there are fewer disruptions to lessons. Staff have given plenty of thought to making the changes needed.

Pupils are polite to staff and visitors. They hold doors open and say 'you are welcome' without a second thought. They sing out proudly and confidently in assembly. They get on well together in mixed-aged groups in classes and around the school.

Ensuring that pupils read well and often is a high priority. Staff training, including opportunities to work with other schools and on special projects, is raising the profile of reading for purpose and for pleasure. Teachers in every class read with their pupils in lessons and at the end of every school day. The focus on phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), early language and communication skills is strong. During the inspection children in the Reception class were working very hard on improving their listening skills. While some pupils are not yet reaching age-related expectations in reading, the signs of improvement are encouraging.

Leaders' strong focus on reading is also beginning to improve pupils' writing. Pupils

are increasingly proud of their work, but some older pupils still struggle to write at length. Teachers are taking a closer look at pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. They make sure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise when they find some things difficult. Extra help is there for anyone who needs it.

In mathematics, some pupils find it hard to remember multiplication tables and to apply reasoning skills to more difficult problems over time. As with reading and writing, there are early signs that pupils' mathematical skills and knowledge are improving. Across all subjects, teachers are checking that things are taught in the most effective order and that pupils can remember more of what they have learned.

In science, which was an area for improvement at the previous inspection, teachers' planning is now more clearly structured. Science lessons include regular practical investigations. For example, during the inspection pupils in Years 5 and 6 worked cooperatively together to complete a practical exercise linked to mass, weight and gravity. The teacher took time to remind them of important 'scientific' key words, such as 'prediction' and 'method'. She made sure that their findings were recorded correctly in science books. Some teachers are less confident than others in teaching science. Leaders are making checks to ensure that science is taught in the most effective way. Work with a science education partnership provides staff with useful resources and subject training for teachers who are not science specialists.

An ambitious new plan for teaching foreign languages, which includes both French and German, was introduced this year. Teachers' planning for pupils' learning in history and geography is improving. Pupils are starting to make the links between different aspects of what they are learning and other subjects. This is helping them to remember more of what they have already learned. In one example, Year 5 pupils were quick to give the name of a Victorian author. They spoke clearly about poverty at that time in history. They knew this because of the book they are reading now in English. This helped them to remember other things that they had learned about before.

Teachers are still working to make sure that they capture these links in their planning across subjects and that things are taught in the most effective order. They are also checking that the most important bits of knowledge and skills are taught first. This is so that pupils build effectively on what they already know. The next step is to plan when to revisit different aspects so that pupils remember more of what they are taught at different times. The impressive classroom 'floor books', which provide an illustrated and thoughtful record of each group's learning, initially designed for parents, are a useful tool to help teachers to do this.

Leaders have raised expectations for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All staff know their pupils exceptionally well. This helps them to offer pupils extra support when they need it. Most pupils attend school regularly, but a few do not attend as often as they should. Work to continue to improve attendance is a priority. This is

because leaders know that pupils fall behind when they are absent from school. There are signs that attendance overall is getting better, but it remains a key focus of leaders' work.

Pupils enjoy educational visits, such as their trips to Ely Cathedral, museums and art galleries. Pupils enjoy talking about these visits and learning about new things in different ways.

Teachers share their ideas about their work in regular meetings and are keen to learn from the good practice of other schools. With the support of senior leaders, the trust and 'curriculum champions', subject leaders have improved the effectiveness of their checks on how well pupils are learning. This information helps them to identify any extra training needed for staff and make sure that it happens quickly.

The trust and the local governing body provide the right balance of challenge and support for school leaders. They are very clear about what is going well in the school and what else needs to improve. Their strong focus on English and mathematics is now shifting to include a wider range of subjects. This is the right thing to do as the school moves forward on the journey towards becoming a good school.

### **External support**

Project work with other schools, including a high-performing London school, is helping all staff to refine their thinking about planning for effective learning. As the school is the lead school in a national science project, teachers are beginning to develop their skills in helping pupils to be curious about science in meaningful ways. The executive headteacher is leading the way on making changes based on a wide range of educational research so that Middleton pupils can be ready to learn and be the best they can be.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**