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20 June 2013

Mr Colin Reid
Headteacher
St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School
King Oswy Drive
West View
Hartlepool
County Durham
TS24 9PB

Dear Mr Reid

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, Hartlepool

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the Governing Body, the local authority and Diocese to discuss actions taken since the inspection. I observed two part-lessons with yourself and the deputy headteacher, spoke to students in lessons and looked at their books. The improvement plan was evaluated alongside other key documents such as outcomes of the school's own lesson observations and assessment information on the progress students have made since September 2012 across the school.

Context

There have been few organisational changes since the inspection. One middle manager has resigned. Three Steering Groups have been set up with a specific remit to monitor progress of actions in the post Ofsted action plan

Main findings

Urgent actions, taken since the inspection, are hastening improvement in the quality of teaching and in students' progress. This is evident in discussions with students, in their work books, in the detailed assessment data and information you share with governors on students' current levels of attainment and in lessons I observed during the visit. The new improvement plan includes all recommendations from the inspection report and has an appropriate number of targets and milestones to help you and governors check the rate of improvement. However, the plan has too many low-level actions. Sometimes targets relate to achievement of the actions rather than the difference these actions will make to the quality of teaching and students' progress. Governors monitoring the plan recently identified this and they are taking action to improve matters. The strategy to ensure that students develop their literacy skills has been strengthened with more opportunities to read widely and often, through for example, regular accelerated reading activities for younger students. Students' evaluations indicate this has increased their involvement in reading, improved their reading skills and the enjoyment they get from books.

Yours and the senior team's regular, short visits to lessons to check how well pupils are learning and whether teachers are taking account of the things they need to do better, is contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching. You know there is still a way to go before every lesson is at least good. Plans are in place for further training and for teachers to observe good practice in local schools such as the King's Academy. Good practice in teaching, already evident in school, is starting to be shared more widely to the benefit of all staff. These actions need to be carried out with more urgency.

Governors are well informed and clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the detailed, regular information they receive and request. For example, about students' progress across the school, improvements to the quality of teaching, and as a result of training such as that provided by the local authority in understanding school performance and student progress data.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- bring forward the planned opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own teaching by observing best practice in other schools and sharing the good practice in school more widely
- reduce the number of actions in the improvement plan to identify only the important actions; linking these to the milestones and measurable targets that help governors know how quickly teaching is improving and how well groups of pupils across the school are achieving.

As agreed with yourself and governors, I will visit the school in the autumn term to carry out joint lesson observations with you and the deputy headteacher and join one of your regular Raising Achievement Meetings with governors. Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

A range of external support is helping to drive improvement in both teaching, and in pupils' progress. For example, by the good, timely challenge and support provided by the local authority, through Regular Steering Group meetings with you, governors and the Diocese, that focus on the difference actions are making to improve teaching and student outcomes. Effective support brokered from Durham Council's Education Development Service is helping to develop the skills of subject leaders in leading their subjects and in improving the quality of teaching in their departments. Partnerships with schools like Kings Academy are being developed to learn from good practice regionally.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hartlepool.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector