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20 July 2018

Mrs Tracey Gibson  
Headteacher  
St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School  
King Oswy Drive  
West View  
Hartlepool  
TS24 9PB

Dear Mrs Gibson

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

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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 good.

The school should take further action to:

- refine and sharpen the actions to continue the improvements in pupils' attendance and behaviour
- check that all teachers set work at the right level of challenge for pupils
- make sure that pupils have specific targets of how to improve in their different subjects.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and members of your senior team. I met with two governors and the diocesan director of education. I examined a range of school documents, including the school improvement plan and self-evaluation,

and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I read the external review about the school's use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. Reports of visits to the school by the local authority adviser were considered. I scrutinised documents and information relating to attendance and behaviour. Records and information relating to the school's work to assess and improve the quality of teaching were examined, including minutes of meetings between senior and subject leaders.

Evidence of the quality of teaching and learning was gathered through observation of lessons and scrutinising pupils' work. I met with pupils formally and informally at breaktime.

I checked the school's records in relation to the safe recruitment of staff.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured your senior leadership team. Two deputy headteachers left the school in the week preceding this monitoring visit.

## **Main findings**

You have an uncompromising determination to improve the school and to establish it at the heart of its local community. To enable you to achieve this aim, you have taken robust action to restructure your senior leadership team. Senior leaders have a clear, accurate and honest understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they have been taking the necessary steps to improve the school.

Leaders' robust self-evaluation is founded on regular monitoring and evaluation of actions taken. As a result of this focused monitoring of plans, leaders know their school well. This has enabled you to refine and change plans along the way, where your evidence is telling you to do so. For example, your careful monitoring of the standards of behaviour in the school led to the introduction of a new 'behaviour for learning' policy. Pupils say that as a result, most teachers now have higher expectations of standards of behaviour.

You have now got a grip of how additional funds are used. For example, following the external review into pupil premium funding, you further developed and strengthened your plans. This has enabled you to identify the barriers which often prevent disadvantaged pupils from achieving as well as they should, and to implement strategies which have been shown to have a proven track record of success in breaking down these barriers. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are starting to improve.

You have worked effectively to strengthen the quality of leadership at all levels by supporting and challenging leaders to raise their game. Your plans for improving the school are 'joined up', because you have made sure that subject leaders take notice

of whole-school priorities in their own plans, and that teachers take notice of these priorities when planning lessons in their respective subject areas. As a result, work in pupils' books shows how better leadership has led to improved pupils' progress, because pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are carefully built on over time.

The level of challenge in the work set for pupils is also improving. Indeed, pupils say that in most cases, teachers now have higher expectations of them and that the work is better matched to their needs. For example, as a consequence of a more consistently applied target-setting system, pupils are challenged to complete tasks which are classed as 'tough', 'tougher' and 'toughest'. However, pupils also said that there is still some variability in the extent to which there are consistently high expectations of them, a situation which is acknowledged by leaders.

You have taken action to help pupils make more progress, by communicating to them what they need to do in order to improve. Pupils generally know their targets and sometimes how to improve, but often this is generalised (for example, 'revise more') and not specific to the subject. You recognise that there is more work to be done here.

As a result of actions taken, the rate of fixed-term exclusions has started to improve, and the number of pupils who are excluded repeatedly is beginning to fall. Following the introduction of the new behaviour policy and 'drawing a line in the sand', the number of behaviour incidents has spiked, but leaders expect a rapid reduction once the new system is fully embedded. Leaders are not complacent, and know that there is more to do to further reduce the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils.

Leaders have taken steps to improve rates of attendance, and there has been some success. While the overall rate of attendance has remained static over two years, attendance for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and children looked after by the local authority, has improved. The persistent absence figure of disadvantaged pupils has decreased from last year, following targeted work.

### **External support**

Leaders have drawn on the expertise of several sources to assist them in their improvement journey. This includes: local authority school improvement advisers for leadership, and for behaviour strategies; the diocesan school improvement adviser; and a national leader of education from a neighbouring teaching school alliance. These have been effective in providing leaders with support for the development of subject leaders' skills; improving the quality of teaching; and for addressing some of the entrenched attitudes around behaviour, of both staff and pupils.

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 Hartlepool Borough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw

**Her Majesty's Inspector**