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11 June 2015

Mrs Margaret Ayden  
Headteacher  
Seahouses First School  
Main Street  
North Sunderland  
Seahouses  
Northumberland  
NE68 7UE

Dear Mrs Ayden

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Seahouses First School, Northumberland**

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 2015, 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- review the school improvement plan to include measurable targets for the proportions of pupils making good or better progress and for the proportion who will exceed age related expectations in each year group
- strengthen the skills of leaders at all levels to accurately judge the quality of teaching over time
- develop and implement a programme of professional development to improve the proportion of good teaching, particularly in mathematics and writing.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, the subject leader for mathematics, a small group of staff, a group of pupils, the Chair, Vice-Chair and another member of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met the headteacher designate who is due to take up post in September 2015. I evaluated the school development plan and scrutinised other documents, including the school's evaluation of its performance, minutes of governing body meetings and records of the monitoring of teaching and pupils' achievement. I toured the school with you, visiting all classrooms and looked at a small sample of pupils' work.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, three additional governors have been recruited to the governing body. The headteacher has announced her retirement from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up post on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015. One teacher will be leaving the school at the end of this academic year and plans are in place to reorganise Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 into two mixed-age classes.

## **Main findings**

Leaders, including governors, have rewritten the school's improvement plan to take account of the findings of the previous inspection. While processes to monitor actions are clearly defined, the targets to improve pupils' achievement are not well focused. Milestones specify the proportion of pupils who will make expected progress and those who will reach age related expectations. However, leaders do not set out their expectations of the proportions of pupils who will make good or outstanding progress and those who will exceed age related expectations. Consequently the plan is not providing a secure enough direction to enable Seahouses First to become a good school.

Middle leaders are extremely committed to improving their subject areas. They have increased the checks they make on the work that pupils complete in lessons. They have also undertaken joint observations of teaching and learning with a senior leader. However, the checks on the quality of teaching do not take sufficient account of how well pupils achieve over time. Consequently, leaders at all levels continue to have an inaccurate view of the quality of teaching. There has been insufficient focus, since the inspection, on the development of the skills of leaders at all levels in this critically important area. This is limiting their ability to set clear direction to improve the quality of teaching.

Recent external moderation by the local authority has indicated that teachers' assessments of pupils' achievement are not consistently accurate. Some teachers do not have sufficient ambition for the progress pupils should make within an academic

year. Teachers set different work for pupils of different abilities; however the level of challenge is often too low. In mathematics, pupils do not have enough opportunities to deepen their understanding through regularly grappling with difficult and absorbing problems. Teachers do not have high enough expectations of the quality of pupils' writing. As a consequence, while the proportion of pupils achieving age related expectations has increased slightly, too few pupils are making the progress of which they are capable to reach higher levels of attainment. The school improvement plan does not outline a robust strategy to provide professional development for teachers to address these issues and to increase the proportion of teaching which is good or outstanding.

You have taken steps to review the marking and feedback policy. Pupils can explain the new 'think pink' strategy, which identifies what they need to do to improve their work. However, the impact of this on pupils' learning is limited. In some classes, marking focuses too much on pupils' effort, rather than highlighting the precise steps that will help pupils to make progress in their learning.

You are now allocating additional teaching assistant time to those groups of pupils who have greatest need of support, including the most able. You have conducted an audit of the skills of all teaching assistants. They have responded extremely positively to this and report that they now have a more accurate understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. They are passionate about wanting to improve their skills; however, there is no coherent programme of professional development in place to help them to do this. Teaching assistants do not have any formal opportunities to meet with teachers or leaders and, consequently, do not have clarity on the most important priorities for improving the school's performance.

Governance has been strengthened since the last inspection. The external review of governance, which was rapidly commissioned following the inspection, has ensured that the governing body has an accurate understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses. The appointment of new governors has brought additional educational expertise. Governors now have a sharper eye on the work of the school through the newly introduced steering committee. They recognise that they still have more work to do to ensure that all governors have the skills to challenge weaknesses in teaching and in pupils' achievement. The governing body took swift action, following the announcement of the existing headteacher's retirement, to recruit a new headteacher for a September start.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

Following the inspection, the local authority acted quickly to undertake a review of the effectiveness of governance. This has resulted in a robust analysis of governors' skills and a clear set of priorities for improvement. The local authority has supported

the school well to recruit governors with the expertise necessary to challenge the school's performance. Minutes of the steering group evidence that governors are beginning to ask more demanding questions of leaders. Governors speak positively about the high quality support that the local authority provided to them during the recent headteacher recruitment process.

The local authority has been proactive in bidding to secure additional funding from the National College of Teaching and Leadership to broker leadership support from an outstanding school. Until this funding is confirmed and work can start, there has been insufficient support to begin to improve the leadership of teaching. Local authority officers have not challenged leaders sufficiently to set ambitious targets for pupils' achievement that will support them to become a good school. The external review of pupil premium funding has been conducted in a timely manner, but lacks precision in the targets which have been set to increase the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown

**Her Majesty's Inspector**