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Mrs Tina Murphy
Headteacher
Holy Trinity CofE VA Primary School
Brockley Avenue
South Shields
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Dear Mrs Murphy

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Holy Trinity CofE VA Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 10-11 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2008.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work and met with senior and middle leaders and Year 6 pupils.

Context

The number of pupils on roll has increased slightly and the nursery is now full. Pupils are in their new classrooms and the refurbishment of the hall and the administrative corridor is expected to be completed in time for the new school year. During the inspection two of the eight teachers were absent from school.

Achievement and standards

When children start school they can do much less than others of their age. They make very good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage unit. School data indicate that outcomes are above and often well above average and that children make consistently good progress in all areas of learning. Children develop very effective personal skills. They are confident and enthusiastic learners and they are able to concentrate on their tasks for long periods of time. They have a secure



understanding of number and money and use mathematical concepts in imaginative play. Children in the Reception class complete lengthy pieces of writing. They use their knowledge of letters and sounds to spell unfamiliar words and they write in complete sentences. Children use information displayed in the classroom to improve their work.

Pupils do not progress well enough in Key Stage 1. Assessments carried out during the year indicate that pupils are making steady progress. However, evidence from pupils' books and the school's most recent data suggest that some assessments may be too generous. Pupils are not developing new skills swiftly enough and too little is expected of them. Pupils make better progress in Key Stage 2 although there are inconsistencies between subjects. School data show that most pupils have made two sub-levels progress although few have met the school's ambitious but achievable target of three sub-levels progress. This is because pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have a considerable legacy of underachievement. Pupils rely on direction from their teachers and few can plan and organise their own work. They do not make natural links between subjects and they have a limited range of skills. Most struggle to use literacy and numeracy in other subjects. Pupils cannot form letters correctly and have not developed fluent and legible handwriting. They do not have secure strategies to help them read and write unfamiliar words and many cannot spell some of the most commonly used words. Most pupils do not use capital or lower case letters accurately and even the oldest and most able pupils struggle to use any but the simplest forms of punctuation. Teachers are not eradicating these weaknesses quickly enough and this is limiting pupils' progress because new skills are not built on secure foundations.

Year 6 pupils report that they felt well prepared for their national Key Stage 2 tests. Attendance was good and no pupil missed a test through absence. The school expects pupils to reach or exceed their targets with outcomes being best in mathematics and weakest in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as their peers because they are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attendance is improving and is now satisfactory overall. Despite the school's best efforts a small proportion of pupils do not attend regularly enough. This has a negative impact on their attainment and on most other aspects of their personal development. Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They listen attentively to their teachers but are very passive in lessons. However, a whole school cookery exhibition was very enthusiastically received and all pupils were keen to participate. They carried out tasks confidently and with evident enjoyment and their behaviour and attitudes were exemplary.

Pupils have a reasonable understanding of how to stay healthy and they carry out activities with regard to their own safety and that of others. Older pupils help out in the school listening to younger pupils read or acting as buddies. The school council has an adequate involvement in the decision making process. However, pupils do not make a strong enough contribution to the school and wider community. They will take on tasks when asked to do so but they do not initiate activities or events. Weaknesses in their basic skills mean that most pupils are not well enough prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching is good and often very good in the Early Years Foundation Stage unit and satisfactory in Key Stage 2. No lessons were observed in Key Stage 1 because both teachers were absent from school. Although the overall quality of teaching is the same as at the time of the last visit there are signs that teaching is improving. The pace of lessons is brisk and teachers have good subject knowledge. Pupils are encouraged to talk to a partner or work as part of a group and this is enhancing their enjoyment of learning and promoting their confidence and understanding. Teachers use interactive white boards to make learning interesting and to remind pupils of their particular tasks. They use national guidance to plan work which is appropriately matched to pupils' ages and in the lessons seen during the visit pupils of different abilities were given different tasks. This is a positive step forward although not all tasks were based on a secure assessment of pupils' needs and some did not challenge pupils enough. Teachers promote the basic skills well in lessons but do not pay enough attention to identifying and correcting weaknesses when marking pupils' work.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from a very good curriculum. They spend much of their time outdoors participating in well planned activities which encourage them to take carefully managed risks. They choose the resources that they think they will need for an activity and have good opportunities to make decisions and improve their work. They have wonderful opportunities to explore the world and extend their knowledge and skills. Teacher-led activities are tightly focused and based on a secure analysis of children's needs and children work well on independent tasks or as part of a wider group.

The curriculum is not as good in Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers do too much for pupils particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Pupils are not independent learners because they have too few opportunities to develop investigative and problem solving skills and teachers rely too heavily on undemanding worksheets. The school is aware of this and is developing a 'Creative Curriculum' in the foundation subjects. Subjects are linked through themes and knowledge and skills are taught as part of a wider study. Visits, themed days and weeks, and visitors to the school support this new way of working. The school plans

this work carefully and ensures that pupils receive their correct entitlement to all subjects. Pupils enjoy this way of working and participate enthusiastically.

Pupils are well cared for, guided and supported. The headteacher and staff know pupils well and vulnerable pupils or those needing a little extra help are supported sensitively.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management continue to improve. The headteacher has very high expectations of staff and pupils. She is determined that the school will help pupils achieve well and prepare them successfully for their future lives. Senior leaders tackle areas of weaknesses and constantly look for ways to improve the school. Much was accomplished in the seven school weeks between the first and second monitoring visits because the senior team took prompt and effective action.

The responsibility for leading and managing aspects of the school's work is now shared by a wider group of staff and some middle leaders are carrying out new or additional responsibilities very effectively. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good thus ensuring that children make an exceptionally good start to their education and that staff benefit from good quality training and development. School self-evaluation is accurate and monitoring procedures are regular and robust.

The extensive building work has not distracted school leaders from their core task of improving outcomes for pupils but the headteacher has kept a close eye on the building work in order to ensure that it meets her very high expectations and provides the best possible environment for pupils. As the school nears the end of its first year it is widening its focus and looking for ways to enrich all aspects of its work. The headteacher has identified needs in the local and wider community and the school is developing a number of strategies to improve partnerships with parents. The school has good capacity to improve further.

External support

The school is well supported by the diocese and by the local authority (LA). There is little need for intensive day-to-day support but the school improvement service ensures that the school is included in appropriate intervention strategies and the headteacher receives effective guidance and support when necessary. There are regular review meetings and the link inspector and other officers have an accurate view of the school's progress. The school improvement partner provides effective support.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is good.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2009:

- Use information gained from marking and day-to-day assessment to plan work which helps pupils overcome weaknesses in their basic skills– satisfactory progress
- Ensure that the tasks pupils are given are accurately matched to their ability– satisfactory progress
- Develop school wide strategies to encourage all pupils to answer questions and contribute their ideas and opinions. – good progress

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should continue to focus on the areas identified during the first monitoring visit.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocese and the Director of Children's Services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector