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12 February 2020

Mrs Lindsay Evans  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Evans

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Middleham Church of England Aided School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2020, 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 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:

- match early reading books to pupils' knowledge more precisely, ensuring that pupils who are learning to read practise using books which contain only the sounds they know
- continue to enhance the quality of education in the early years, including opportunities for children to practise reading, writing and mathematics in the outdoor learning environment

- ensure that governors have the skills to hold leaders to account more stringently for the school's performance.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held a telephone conversation with the teaching school council lead to discuss planned support from a national leader of education. I also evaluated the school's improvement plans.

I visited all three classes and held meetings with the subject leaders for English and mathematics.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, the school has federated with Spennithorne Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School. The executive headteacher leads both schools. One governing body operates across the two schools. Since September 2019, Middleham pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 have been transported each day to the Spennithorne site for their lessons. Similarly, Spennithorne pupils in Reception, Years 1, 5 and 6 have their lessons at Middleham. The schools are three and a half miles apart. There are now three full-time teachers working across the two schools. One teacher took up their post in September 2019.

## **Main findings**

Since the last inspection, you have focused on improving the areas identified in the inspection report. This includes building leadership capacity. A new English leader is now in place. She has benefited from professional development and is taking responsibility for leading improvements in English. This includes supporting colleagues and checking on their effectiveness.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve teaching in reading, including phonics. Since then, you have started to redesign the curriculum, putting reading at the centre of learning in all subjects. Pupils now read high-quality books which are linked to their topics. They encounter a wide range of authors, genres and themes through class reading books. You have also focused on increasing pupils' motivation to read by developing the school library and reading areas. Pupils are enthused by the rewards they receive for reading at home. You have introduced systems to record the frequency of pupils' reading at home and school. Teachers use this information to ensure that pupils who are not reading at home have time to read with teaching staff or the school's newly trained reading volunteers.

In phonics, you have ensured that staff are trained and have suitable subject knowledge. Leaders provide ongoing support for staff and regularly check on the effectiveness of phonics teaching. Adults are now more consistent in using the school's chosen strategies to help pupils to remember phonics knowledge.

Leaders have worked on matching the books pupils use to practise early reading to their phonics knowledge. However, pupils, particularly those who struggle with reading, still come across sounds they do not know. This hinders their fluency and confidence. There is more work to do to ensure that books are precisely matched to pupils' knowledge when they are learning to read.

Since the last inspection, you have focused on raising teachers' expectations of pupils' achievements. You have approached this by ensuring that the curriculum is suitably ambitious. Leaders have had considerable success in this respect in mathematics. Pupils now use their secure number and calculation knowledge to do increasingly complex activities. This includes solving problems and explaining their mathematical reasoning. Consequently, pupils are developing a deeper understanding of concepts.

In writing, teachers now use checklists and redrafting techniques to let pupils know the standard of writing that is expected. Pupils also enjoy collecting and using ambitious words which enhance their writing. These strategies are improving the quality of pupils' writing.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of the early years. Changes in staffing have meant that improvements have not been secured as quickly as you intended. A comprehensive programme of professional development has been effective in supporting staff. Adults design activities so that children practise and consolidate their new learning independently. For example, during the visit, children enjoyed writing target words in flour using paint brushes. There is work to do to further enhance the learning environment, particularly outdoors.

Governors were asked to improve their effectiveness at the last inspection. They have since accessed relevant training. They know what the priorities are and what actions leaders are taking. They receive a range of information about the school's performance. They are beginning to hold leaders to account for the school's effectiveness. However, there is further work for governors to ensure that they are challenging leaders stringently regarding the priorities for improvement.

Leaders' plans for improvement are focused appropriately on the priorities identified at the last inspection. However, plans are not linked tightly to pupils' outcomes. This makes it more difficult for leaders, including governors, to hold others to account.

## **External support**

Leaders have been supported effectively by the local authority. Much of this support has centred on the federation process. The local authority has also provided professional development in relation to early years, assessment, governance and leadership of English and mathematics.

The school is entitled to support through the teaching school council for North Yorkshire. However, through no fault of the school, this support has been delayed and had not started at the time of this visit. Despite this, leaders are taking effective action to address the priorities for improvement. Support through a national leader of education has now been secured and is due to start imminently. Plans are in place for this support to focus on the ongoing priorities for improvement, including governance and the early years.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds (ce), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karine Hendley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**