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Mrs Lynne Wade
Headteacher
Kirkby Stephen Primary School
Nateby Road
Kirkby Stephen
Cumbria
CA17 4AE

Dear Mrs Wade

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Kirkby Stephen Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 November 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the school improvement officer, consultants, governors and children who met with me.

At the time of the last inspection there had been some recent turbulence in staffing. There have been further changes since that inspection, including the appointment of a teacher to Year 6 and a full-time teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Several teachers have changed year groups. At the time of this inspection there was a supply teacher in Year 1 and a temporary job sharing arrangement in Year 5. A new deputy headteacher is expected to join the school in January 2011 following the retirement of the current deputy.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 February 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

School leaders and staff have initiated appropriate and timely changes to monitoring procedures, teaching, and assessment, which are improving the quality of provision. Pupils are making better progress in lessons and the work in their books indicates that more pupils are working at age-related expectations in each class. However, these improvements are not reflected in the unvalidated 2010 end of Key Stage 2 test results and some issues remain in relation to pupils' progress in writing. Improvements have had a more immediate impact on achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children make good progress from their broadly

average starting points. Attainment at Key Stage 1 has been sustained at broadly average levels.

In 2010, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 was well below average in all subjects and well below expectations based on pupils' prior attainment. Their attainment in writing was particularly low. In the current Year 6 class the percentage of pupils reaching age-related expectations is closer to average in reading and mathematics. However, pupils lack some fundamental skills in handwriting, punctuation and spelling because these skills have not been taught systematically. This means that levels attained in writing are lower than they should be given the pupils' rich vocabulary, good imagination and ability to organise their writing. These weaknesses mean that the school could receive an 'inadequate' judgement for pupils' progress in the next section 5 inspection unless there is sufficient evidence that pupils' achievement in writing has been raised.

Staff are aware of the issues and have implemented changes to ensure a more systematic approach to teaching basic skills. They are providing appropriate phonics and spelling teaching in ability groups and more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills across the curriculum. They are also making better use of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning in all subjects. Pupils are responding positively to these changes. They are well behaved, cooperative and motivated to achieve well. Their positive attitudes and considerate behaviour, together with the school's robust safeguarding procedures, help pupils feel safe and enjoy school.

Good professional development has supported teachers in improving subject knowledge and broadening their range of teaching strategies. All classes were visited and an increased proportion of good teaching was observed. No inadequate teaching was seen. In the good lessons, teachers gave clear explanations and planned an interesting range of activities, which were well matched to pupils' ability. The teaching of writing was well planned to make links with prior learning and take account of pupils' interests. There were some missed opportunities to challenge pupils' thinking fully and enable them to apply their skills in the satisfactory lessons.

Teachers have a more secure understanding of the levels pupils are working at, so that assessments are increasingly accurate. These underpin the tracking system, which has been further developed to tackle underachievement at an early stage. The recently introduced pupil progress meetings ensure that school leaders and teachers are fully aware of pupils who are not making the expected progress. Learning targets are generally appropriate, although in some cases curricular targets do not take sufficient account of the gaps in pupils' prior learning. Further refinements are planned to ensure that more detailed analysis of pupils' work identifies gaps in learning to inform planning and target setting. The revised marking policy is being consistently applied so that most pupils know how to improve their work from day to day.

School leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the school's current position and are effectively driving improvements. They have ensured that the Raising Attainment Plan has been implemented to planned timescales, with accurate self-evaluation informing the next steps. The senior leadership team has been strengthened with subject leaders taking an increasing role in monitoring and action planning. Feedback to teachers is more sharply focused on developments needed to raise achievement and improve outcomes for all pupils. Staff are supportive of the changes and are working hard to improve provision.

The local authority statement of action is judged fit for purpose and actions are having a positive impact on the quality of leadership and provision. Local authority advisers and consultants have provided effective support to school leaders, governors and staff.

I hope that you found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that teaching is of a consistently good quality to motivate pupils and accelerate their progress
 - making sure teachers know what levels pupils are working at and use assessment to set tasks which closely match their ability
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills across different subjects across the curriculum
 - ensuring that the school's marking policy and teachers' marking of work lead to pupils having a clearer understanding of their next steps in learning.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the school's leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that monitoring of teaching focuses sharply on learning and improving outcomes for pupils
 - making greater use of tracking information to quickly tackle underachievement and accelerate progress.