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13 October 2010

Miss Zena Lines
Acting Headteacher
Coniston Church of England Primary School
Shepherd's Bridge
Coniston
Cumbria
LA21 8AL

Dear Miss Lines

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Coniston Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 October 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – **good**

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

John Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and improve the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have higher expectations of pupils
 - lesson planning is more detailed, tightly linked to assessment and consistently challenging for all pupils
 - pupils are fully aware of how well they are doing for their age
 - the curriculum in English, mathematics and science is more engaging.
- Improve the ethos of the school and the morale of pupils, by:
 - establishing a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour
 - increasing the rigour of procedures for ensuring pupils' well-being and for meeting safeguarding requirements
 - ensuring the school offers opportunities for increasing spirituality by pupils.
- Enhance the school's ability to sustain improvement, by:
 - creating and monitoring detailed action plans based on clear analyses and linked to precise outcomes for pupils
 - developing better channels of communication with parents and carers
 - monitoring teaching and assessment strategies rigorously.

Special measures: monitoring of Coniston Church of England Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 October 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the senior teacher, two groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the School Improvement Partner and spoke with some parents and carers.

Context

Shortly after the inspection in April, the substantive headteacher left the school and through the support of the local authority a new external acting headteacher was appointed. In the light of staffing changes and varying pupil numbers, classes were reorganised at the end of the summer term. There are now four small mixed-age classes operating in the morning including a joint Nursery Year and Reception Year class. In the afternoon, there is one Key Stage 1 class that includes Reception Year pupils and one Key Stage 2 class. The acting headteacher has responsibility for teaching Years 5 and 6 in the mornings. The local authority has provided a high level of support for the school.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The changes that have occurred since the last inspection have significantly improved the ethos of the school and the pupils' consequent enjoyment of learning. The quality of teaching and the pace of learning have improved, particularly at Key Stage 2. The pupils have noticed the changes that have taken place and they demonstrate a keenness to learn and are positive about school and what it has to offer. As one pupil stated 'our school has got better and I enjoy my work now and there's no messing about by the older ones'. The pupils achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the Key Stage 1 class and standards are higher than in most schools. At Key Stage 2, the pupils' improved attitudes to school and their willingness to learn, mask a legacy of underperformance and underachievement. Although many are working at or close to the level expected for their age, few exceed this, particularly in English. On the whole, the quality of pupils' writing falls below their oral language competence. Pupils are, in the main, articulate, fluent, mature speakers who can listen attentively and critically and who draw on a good bank of knowledge and experience. This shows in their ideas for writing and the vocabulary used, although their writing does not match the richness heard in conversations and discussions. Some of the pupils' writing has spelling errors and inaccurate or absent punctuation. The school now realises it faces the dual task of dealing with the legacy of poor habits and gaps in learning while raising the bar substantially to get the best out of the pupils. In lessons, pupils are being challenged

more by the content and the pace or the expected outcomes for the activities and tasks. National test results need to be treated cautiously because of the very low numbers of pupils involved, however, they do confirm the high standards of attainment at Key Stage 1 and broadly average attainment at Key Stage 2. The school is fully aware of the need, and has established appropriate plans, to accelerate the progress of pupils at Key Stage 2. Examination of the school's own assessment and tracking data shows that progress is good at Key Stage 1 and beginning to accelerate at Key Stage 2. In lessons, the pupils make better progress because of the strategies that have been introduced to ensure consistency across the school. The work in pupils' books shows signs of an improving trend in the quality of presentation and content.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

At the time of the Ofsted inspection, morale at the school was low. Since that time, coinciding with the arrival of the new acting headteacher, there has been a demonstrable and significant improvement in the morale of staff and pupils; they are now smiling and enjoying what school has to offer. The behaviour and attitudes of the pupils, particularly those at the top end of Key Stage 2, have improved significantly. There was no misbehaviour observed in any lessons or in and around the school. Occasionally, a few pupils become restless when the pace of teaching slows. The pupils are polite, diligent and know how to behave in all situations. Although Nursery Year and Reception Year children could hardly contain their excitement when they had the opportunity to fish for conkers with a net, they behaved impeccably in waiting for their turn and helping others count their catch. Both groups of older pupils who spoke with the inspector commented that the school is now a happier place to be and they are doing interesting work. One older pupil said, 'things are explained to us now including the homework we are given'. Those parents and carers who spoke with the inspector also commented positively about the school changing for the better and said that it has a calmer atmosphere. Attendance is high and the pupils are welcomed by staff as they enter the building in the morning. A strategic approach has been taken to strengthen the provision for the pupils' spiritual development, including planning a list of themed assemblies for the term which are shared with staff to enable links to other activities, such as circle time. In one assembly following a reading of the story, 'We're going on a bear hunt' there was time provided for the pupils to reflect and think about who they could go to if they were worried or scared about something. The school is a very different place to that described in the April report.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the ethos of the school and the morale of pupils – **good**

The effectiveness of provision

Staff changes and a more coherent and consistent approach to how lessons are planned and delivered has strengthened how well the pupils are taught and how well they learn. The teacher-pupil ratio, particularly in the morning sessions, is very

favourable and the pupils benefit from a lot of individual attention and support. Teachers and support assistants follow new and agreed planning formats and have also acted on the guidance of consultants from the local authority. Teachers' expectations are higher regarding planning lessons, organising classrooms to support learning, providing a range of learning experiences and drawing on national guidance. In lessons, pupils are being asked to talk to partners, to explain their reasoning and to work on practical tasks. Teaching flair shows in the use of interactive whiteboards and practical, engaging activities, such as using checklists to improve writing or recording when personal targets have been met. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go to ensure greater consistency of approach throughout the school so that all pupils get a buzz out of lessons. In the mixed Year 1 and Year 2 class, the pupils enjoyed taking part in activities based on the theme of pirates and lost treasure. They were enthused by role play and other activities aimed at stimulating their thinking to engage in an imaginative writing task. In most lessons, pupils benefit from confident, structured teaching. The teachers know what they want the pupils to learn and the steps needed to ensure it. They question the pupils well to probe their understanding. They also keep a keen eye on how well pupils are doing and set new challenges for individuals. However, in some lessons opportunities are occasionally missed to question pupils' thinking and to help them realise for themselves how new learning builds on what they know.

Despite the improvements in teaching and learning at Key Stage 2, the legacy of underachievement identified at the last inspection is taking time to overcome. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge but staff are mindful of this and are planning accordingly. The school is building a clear, accurate picture of how well each pupil is doing across the curriculum. There is a growing acceptance of accountability for pupils' learning and staff are tailoring their teaching to ensure that pupils achieve their targets. Some inconsistencies remain, for example, in how teachers mark pupils' work and whether reference is made to this feedback at the start of lessons. Where this is done well, the marking challenges individuals and evaluates how well previous guidance has been followed. As a result, pupils act on the points made and do not repeat the same errors. A good example of this is the pupils' improved use of calculation methods in mathematics following teachers' comments.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise attainment and improve the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2 – **satisfactory**

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of the new acting headteacher has been the catalyst for change and she has done sterling work to date in changing the ethos of the school and driving the necessary improvement. She has begun to build confidence among the staff and pupils and relationships are excellent. The acting headteacher has worked closely with the local authority, governing body and staff to gain an accurate view of the school's most pressing needs. A detailed audit of the school's provision was instigated to ensure the right priorities within each main area for improvement were

chosen. This led to the construction of an effective 'Raising of Attainment Plan' with clearly identified priorities for the school, including appropriate timescales and measurable success criteria. The school's and the local authority's plans are aligned and are on track. There is a clear and determined focus on improving the school's learning environment by removing clutter, opening up spaces for learning and enhancing classroom and school displays. Other priorities focus on improving the consistency in the quality of teaching and raising standards at Key Stage 2. Teaching is being closely monitored and evaluated and the staff are responsive to ideas and suggestions for improvement.

The acting headteacher and governing body have put in place some new systems and procedures essential to the smooth running of the school and to fulfilling statutory requirements. Clear management responsibilities have been established, new practices introduced, essential training given and additional training planned for the year ahead. The required record of checks on adults' suitability to work with children is up to date and complete. The procedures to verify visitors and the procedures at the start and end of the school day and at break and lunchtimes have strengthened the school's safety. The governing body is becoming more proactive in playing its part in helping to lead and manage the school. The Chair of the Governing Body is fully aware of the school's priorities and is working closely with the school and the local authority. Individual governors are playing their part as well, for example, a governor has been assigned to each of the three main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and they produce reports to the full governing body on how well the school is doing.

Parents and carers have remained supportive of the school and the acting headteacher is gradually strengthening relationships with them. Parents and carers spoke positively about demonstrable improvements that have happened since the arrival of the acting headteacher. This view was also shared by staff and pupils. The school is well placed to become less dependent on the local authority and to sustain further improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Enhance the school's ability to sustain improvement – **good**

External support

The support from the local authority has been good. The local authority had identified the school as being one of concern prior to the April Ofsted inspection. Following the inspection, quick and decisive action was taken including appointing an effective acting headteacher from within the local authority. The statement of action has clear objectives and success criteria relating to the main areas of improvement and has been judged to be fit for purpose. In the autumn term, the plan steered the work of literacy consultants and others with specialist expertise. As a result, the staff have had input on key aspects and been encouraged to use strategies, procedures and techniques that are common practice elsewhere. The School Improvement Partner has established expectations of pupils' progress and worked with the school

to set appropriately challenging targets for the current Year 6 and following year groups. The school has benefited from the support and services of the local authority in several aspects of its work but particularly in resolving issues related to leadership and management, supporting the Early Years Foundation Stage and enhancing pupils' progress at Key Stage 2. A monitoring review group has been set up by the local authority, with a clear focus on the issues that were hindering progress and what might be done to alleviate them, including drawing on expertise from other schools. The reports from the School Improvement Officer/School Improvement Partner have been incisive and useful. They give the school and the local authority a clear picture of what has been done, where things have improved and where there are still areas to be developed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Development of the pupils' writing skills, particularly at Key Stage 2.
- Greater consistency in the use of classroom strategies to promote effective learning, including how the pupils' work is marked.