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7 February 2011

Mrs S Binns
Headteacher
Hellifield Community Primary School
Kendal Road
Hellifield
Skipton
North Yorkshire
BD23 4HA

Dear Mrs Binns,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Hellifield Community Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 February 2011, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the members of the governing body and local authority representatives for the discussions we had and also a special thank-you to the pupils I met.

The staffing complement has been stable since the inspection 15 months ago. This has enabled systems to become embedded and allowed for initiatives to have an impact.

As a result of the inspection on 4 November 2009, 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' rate of progress is increasing and attainment is improving. The focus on writing has paid dividends. All pupils are now making better progress, with many making more progress than would be expected. As a consequence, the gap between pupils' attainment in reading and writing is narrowing but leaders recognise there is still a way to go. A particular success has been in giving opportunities for pupils to write at length and to use their skills in other subjects. For example, boys were motivated to write poems about bush fires, and reports of life in Ancient Egypt in their humanities lessons. However, leaders have identified that spelling and sentence structure remain areas for improvement. While the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 2 appears to have declined, some of this is attributable to the specific needs of the group and to the small numbers in the cohort. Overall, the proportion of pupils attaining age-related expectations in all subjects is showing an upward trend. Pupils are well behaved. They have good attitudes to school and to learning. Their attendance is well above average. These factors aid their progress.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Teaching has many strengths. Lessons are planned conscientiously and classrooms are well organised with attractive displays to support learning. Relationships with pupils are very good and teachers have a good understanding of the subjects they teach. However, some features of good teaching are not fully embedded in all lessons, such as using the outcomes of assessment to plan the next stage of learning for individual pupils. The use of teaching assistants is equally variable. On occasions, assistants were used effectively for individual or small group work, but at other times, more support was needed to accelerate the progress of pupils who learn more slowly. Teachers identify opportunities for pupils to improve their speaking and listening in their planning and this regularly works well. Sometimes, however, adults accept one-word answers when a phrase or sentence would be appropriate and would extend pupils' vocabulary, thinking, and therefore, their writing.

The governing body has come a long way since the last inspection, but is still at an early stage of development. Governors are no longer dependent on the headteacher for information. They are far more knowledgeable and are beginning to fulfil their role of holding the school to account. They have taken stock of their strengths and undertaken training to become more effective. When members of the governing body visit classrooms they now have a focus and the activity is proving useful for all parties involved. Alongside the drive and vision of the headteacher, this contributes to the school's capacity to continue to improve. Subject leadership is improving. Developments in the leadership of mathematics have resulted in better staff knowledge and clearer planning. In addition, through parental workshops, parents and carers now have a greater understanding and are more involved in their child's education. Similarly, the leadership of information and communication technology (ICT) has moved forward. Considerable work has been undertaken using the local authority e-learning platform. A check on pupils' knowledge has been carried out, but leaders have not audited the adults' skills, or formalised how all elements of ICT will be used to support learning in other subjects. While the leadership of both these subjects is currently secure, their future management and development are still in the planning stage.

The school has received good support from a consultant headteacher and from a literacy consultant. This support is planned to continue until the end of the academic year. The local authority has increased confidence in the school, though it remains in the classification of 'school requiring additional temporary support'.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Katharine Halifax
Additional Inspector

January 2011

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 4 November 2009

- Raise standards, particularly in writing for boys.
- Accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring the good teaching practices evident in some lessons are consistently well applied across all classes.
- Extend the skills of subject leaders and governors so that the responsibility for reviewing the school's performance, monitoring the quality of provision and driving improvements forward can be equally shared.