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14 February 2011

Miss Z Lines
Headteacher
Coniston CofE Primary School
Shepherd's Bridge
Coniston
Cumbria
LA21 8AL

Dear Miss Lines,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Coniston C of E Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 and 11 February 2011, 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 second 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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

Mr John Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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 CofE Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, examined a sample of the pupils' books from every class and met with the acting headteacher, a representative from the local authority and spoke with some parents and carers.

Context

The temporary acting headteacher, who joined the school shortly after the inspection in April 2010, remains in post. The governing body has recently advertised for a new permanent headteacher and hope to make an appointment in March 2011. Pupil numbers remain low but they are increasing slightly in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

The school has continued to build on the promising start it made following its section 5 inspection in April 2010. The acting headteacher and staff have worked hard to improve the rate of pupils' achievement across the school. Pupils are learning more in their lessons and this is reflected in the work in their books. The school's assessment data confirm that progress is beginning to accelerate in all year groups. Although generally positive, the data also show that progress is not yet consistent across all areas of the pupils' work and there are variations between the achievement of boys and girls. Overall, however, the trend is positive, leading to more pupils achieving at least the expected standard for their age. Performance in reading and mathematics are stronger than in writing; the latter remains a significant weakness, mainly among boys.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the improvements noted at the time of the first monitoring visit have continued and children achieve well. The small numbers involved mean children receive a high level of individual attention and support from the teaching and support staff. The range of learning opportunities provided and the classroom environment have also improved. The children's acquisition of basic skills is improving. When playing a number game the Nursery children could recognise numbers to six and correctly count out the corresponding number of beads and thread them onto a 'washing line'. They understood 'one more than' and 'less than' when they were counting. Similarly, the Reception-aged children, when playing a 'letters game,' could listen and recognise blended letter sounds and make correct choices by standing next to the corresponding letters that were positioned around a play area.

At Key Stage 1, pupils continue to make good progress. In a science lesson, they enjoyed exploring how light from different sources forms shadows and how the length of a shadow is affected by the light source position. Pupils enjoy the variety of learning experiences provided for them. For example, during the week of this monitoring inspection, Key Stage 1 pupils visited a wildlife park and a local day centre for the elderly. At Key Stage 2, the legacy of pupils' underperformance and underachievement is more evident and engrained. Gaps in knowledge and experience persist and further remedial steps have been identified. Although more pupils are now working at or close to the level expected for their age, few exceed this level, particularly in English. The quality of pupils' writing, particularly boys', falls well below their oral language competence. Some of their writing shows a lack of basic awareness of the sounds that letters make, resulting in incorrect spellings of many simple words. The school has made good progress in motivating pupils and some of the missing building blocks in literacy and numeracy skills are now being planned and taught systematically to improve the rate of pupils' progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The positive start to rebuild and strengthen the school's ethos made at the time of the previous monitoring visit has continued. The school is an orderly community in which pupils appear happy and enjoy the range of experiences on offer. The behaviour of the pupils observed in lessons, at break and lunch-times and around the school was good. Pupils are polite, friendly and demonstrate a tangible sense of pride when talking to visitors about their school and the work in which they are involved. Whole-school celebration assemblies aimed at recognising and praising the achievements of individual children demonstrate the hard work that staff and pupils have undertaken to raise morale and celebrate success. Some underlying behavioural and attitudinal issues remain, but, overall, good progress has been made.

Attendance is high and punctuality to school and to lessons is good. Attendance is celebrated in assemblies with the best class each week receiving an award. The strategic approach that has been taken to strengthen the provision for pupils' spiritual development, including planning themed assemblies for the term, is producing more thoughtful and reflective collective worship. A representative from the diocese has reviewed its religious education curriculum with a view to making recommendations for better outcomes for pupils. Similarly, a recent audit has taken place of the school's provision for promoting healthy lifestyles and its findings have encouraged the school to work towards Healthy School status.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- improve the ethos of the school and the morale of pupils – good

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved slightly since the previous monitoring inspection. The activities and tasks provided for the pupils are better matched to their different ages and prior attainment than was the case previously. The task that teachers face, particularly in the afternoon sessions, of providing suitable learning opportunities to meet the needs of three or more different age groups in a single class, is a challenging one. This is being met more successfully now because of the improvements made to long and short-term planning for lessons and the more robust and shared information from the school's assessment and tracking systems. This more coherent and consistent approach to lesson planning and delivery has strengthened teaching and learning. An examination of pupils' books from every year group showed that the improved match of work observed in lessons was increasingly evident in work recorded in books. Support staff work diligently to help individual pupils and groups achieve the shared learning objectives for each lesson. Teachers' expectations have been raised and this can be seen in lessons and the rate of work recorded in pupils' books. In lessons, pupils participated more in their learning than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. They listened more attentively, offered responses to teachers' questioning readily and got on with the tasks in hand. In a mixed Year 5 and 6 literacy lesson pupils quickly transferred the ideas they had created on paper in their classroom to a computer design in the information and communication technology suite.

In lessons, in the work recorded in books and through the school's improved assessment tracking systems, it is evident that pupils are making slightly better progress now than at the time of the previous monitoring visit. Teaching and learning continue to improve, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at lower Key Stage 2. Lessons generally move along at a quicker pace, are more interesting and are more demanding of pupils. The school is gradually eradicating the underachievement that has occurred in the past.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, work has started on tackling the inconsistencies identified in how pupils' work is marked and how feedback is provided to pupils on their achievements. The school's marking policy has been reviewed and a guidance file on its implementation has been introduced. Although there are emerging signs of an improving trend in the quality of marking, the impact of this work has yet to be seen consistently across all year groups. Similarly, while individual learning targets have been set in literacy and numeracy for each pupil, it is not clear how these affect the activities provided for pupils or how or when targets have been achieved. In some pupils' books, the target is recorded and updated with comments as to when it has been achieved. In others, targets sit idle, having been left blank and not updated so it is difficult for the pupil to know their relevance or importance. In the poorest examples a target, such as 'you must learn to write sentences with a capital letter and a full stop' are recorded as a target for the autumn term, not updated, then recorded as the same target in the spring term. It is difficult to justify this practice, particularly when the work subsequently provided for pupils appears to be generic to all pupils and not marked with the target focus in mind. A key weakness, identified at the time of the school's previous inspection that pupils do not always know how well they are doing, remains a

concern for a minority of pupils. Overall, however, there are gains being made at Key Stage 2 and progress is steadily improving.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment and improve the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2 – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher continues to be the catalyst for positive change. She is driving forward the necessary improvements and is being fully supported by the staff. The acting headteacher teaches the upper Key Stage 2 class in the mornings and this provides a good role model for all staff. She continues to work closely with the local authority, governing body and staff to focus appropriately on the school's most pressing needs. With the help of the school's local authority adviser, the acting headteacher has conducted joint observations of teaching and learning and their judgements have proved beneficial in evaluating the impact of the changes that have been introduced, as well as pointing to areas for further improvement.

The school's 'Raising Attainment Plan' has been regularly updated and shared with staff, the governing body and the local authority. Examination of the school's improvement documentation shows the school is on track with its planned timeline of improvement. The inconsistencies previously identified in both classroom practice and school routines have been reduced through the introduction of clear and agreed policies and procedures. A significant improvement has been the introduction of a whole-school strategy to improve writing, including spelling and handwriting. It is too early to say if this development is having the impact required, but early signs are encouraging.

Communication with parents and carers and the wider community has been strengthened. Additional 'welcome meetings' have been introduced to allow parents and carers the opportunity to learn more about what pupils are doing. Approximately half of the parents and carers attended these recent additional meetings. A weekly newsletter is sent home. Parents and carers also know they can come into school to see individual members of staff or the acting headteacher should they have a difficulty. The acting headteacher is winning the hearts and minds of most parents and carers in making the required changes to the school to increase its effectiveness as a place for learning. With the help of staff she has raised standards of behaviour and enhanced significantly the attitudes of the pupils towards school and towards each other. The parents and grandparents who spoke with the inspector at the start and end of the school day commented positively about the school and the changes. Comments included 'the school's more open now' and 'we get more information than before'. Some difficulties regarding communication and the perceived actions of the school remain. This was illustrated by the decision of a small number of parents of Year 6 girls to withdraw their children from school for the day. Following discussions with the acting headteacher, the parents returned their children to school the next day.

The acting headteacher and governing body have continued to put in place systems and procedures essential to the smooth running of the school and to fulfilling statutory requirements. The acting headteacher's reports to the governing body are detailed and informative. Clear management responsibilities have been established, including the required record of checks on adults' suitability to work with children. The governing body, having become fully aware of the school's priorities, is working closely with the school and the local authority. Together they are engaged in the process of appointing a permanent headteacher. The school's direction is clear and its improvement programme is on track. Despite the occasional setback, including the lack of confidence of a few parents, the school is well placed to sustain further improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- enhance the school's ability to sustain improvement - good

External support

The support from the local authority continues to be good. In January 2011, a thorough review of the school's effectiveness was conducted by two of its school improvement officers. The subsequent report highlighted the improvements that had been made and the areas that still required further development. The school's adviser keeps in regular contact with the school and is monitoring progress closely. The local authority's statement of action has been evaluated and updated. Individual members of staff have received support and coaching to enable a more consistent approach to lesson planning and delivery. The monitoring review group, set up by the local authority, continues to meet to review the school's progress.

Priorities for further improvement

- further develop pupils' writing skills, particularly at Key Stage 2.