

CfBT Inspection Services T 0300 1231231  
Suite 22 [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
West Lancs Investment Centre [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

**Direct T** 01695 566934  
**Direct F** 01695 729320  
[gtunncliffe@cfbt.com](mailto:gtunncliffe@cfbt.com)  
[www.cfbt-inspections.com](http://www.cfbt-inspections.com)



20 June 2011

Mr J Wood  
Headteacher  
St Bees Village Primary School  
Main Street  
St Bees  
Cumbria  
CA27 0AA

Dear Mr Wood,

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Bees Village Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 June 2011, for the time given to phone discussions and for the information which your staff provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to the governing body and the local authority for assistance with this visit.

As a result of the inspection on 02 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have taken a range of appropriate steps to improve achievement and accelerate pupils' progress. Staff are working more effectively as a team and are increasingly receptive to new ideas. As a consequence, the legacy of underachievement is beginning to be tackled more effectively and senior leaders are aware of the need to focus more clearly on how well the school is performing.

Pupils' work in lessons and in their books, together with the school's own assessment information, show that there are signs of better progress on the part of some pupils, including the more able. For example, increasing numbers of pupils from most year groups are on track to have made expected or better than expected progress in this academic year. This reflects the better impact of the school's intervention work. Tracking systems which identify pupils who are underachieving and those who require extra challenges are being used more effectively by some teachers to plan work at the appropriate level, although this is not consistent in all year groups. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make. Meetings to review pupils' progress have begun with some teachers and further work is planned to establish a regular pattern with all staff. As a result, the school is developing its ability to judge how well pupils are achieving and plan appropriate support.

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Although not yet consistent in all classes, teachers are gaining confidence in judging the level of pupils' work and in pin-pointing what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge in other subjects with the provision of further tasks which require pupils to investigate and solve problems. The use of success criteria in teachers' planning is developing pupils' understanding of how their work can be improved, particularly in writing but again, this is not uniformly used by all staff. In addition, the scrutiny of pupils' work reveals that teachers are designing and delivering activities which are better matched to pupils' different needs. However, senior leaders are well aware that at times the tasks set for pupils of higher ability are not always demanding enough and are restricted to composing a longer piece of writing or tackling a harder sum with insufficient attention paid to the higher-order thinking skills that pupils need.

Pupils have positive attitudes to their work are keen to succeed; even when activities are less engaging, they work hard and behave well. When asked to express their views there was strong recognition that more of their work is now challenging and interesting. They particularly enjoy the increased opportunities to discuss and share their ideas with others and to use and apply their knowledge in practical problem solving and investigative activities. Increasingly they comment that: 'we get to do lots of different things now', 'the teachers really help us and look after us', 'maths is fun', although others reported that sometimes some of their work is still 'too easy', particularly in literacy. As one child commented, 'sometimes we do things that we already know'.

Another factor contributing to pupils' better progress is the improvements to teaching and learning are increasing the progress pupils make in lessons. There are more good lessons evident. Although variable in some instances, the planning of pupils' work is beginning to be focused more on outcomes and targets as well as on activities for different abilities. Where teaching is strong, teachers have the confidence to stand back and let pupils make the learning their own. Teaching assistants provide an effective layer of extra support, particularly for those pupils who find learning difficult. Teachers question pupils effectively which keeps pupils on their toes, although at times the questioning of more-able pupils is insufficiently challenging. Where teaching is less strong, teachers over-direct, too many worksheets are used and pupils are less engaged in their work.

The school has adjusted its procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Subject leaders in literacy and numeracy have been allocated time to support colleagues and have begun to observe lessons and scrutinise pupils' work. This is leading to a greater awareness by middle leaders of the gaps in provision and where improvements are required. In addition, it has helped them to become more influential in their work with colleagues. However, some of the lesson observations by senior leaders, although more focused, are not frequent enough and insufficiently targeted on the quality of pupils' learning and progress, including the progress of different groups within the lesson. Observation records do not always give enough precise information to staff about the overall judgement on the quality of the lesson and how things may be improved. Furthermore, staff have yet to agree formally on the key principles of what constitutes effective practice in teaching and learning.

While improving, teachers' guidance to pupils through marking and target-setting is variable. There are some good examples, particularly in Year 6, where pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work and reach the next level. However, there are not enough examples of marking that challenges individuals or evaluates how well previous guidance has been followed. Consequently, on occasion, some pupils do not always act on the points made and thus repeat the same errors.

The quality of the school's self-evaluation is improving with a greater awareness of pupils' outcomes. The school improvement plan contains appropriate actions linked to the areas for improvement. However, some of the actions have insufficient quantitative success criteria, making it difficult for governors, in particular, to identify progress or slippage over time. The governing body is far more focused in its work and has improved its effectiveness. Through training and support, members of the governing body have increased their knowledge and understanding of the school and have begun to work effectively in checking on pupils' work and in observing lessons. The formation of a 'focus group' has enabled the governing body to be better informed about the school's performance.

Senior staff and the governing body are keen to move the school forward. The collective responsibility for improving the school is gathering momentum. Everyone is committed to raising the achievement of all pupils further. Nevertheless, the leadership team, including the governing body and the School Improvement Partner, are acutely aware that satisfactory teaching is not good enough to accelerate pupils' progress so that all achieve as well as they might. Senior leaders are also aware of the need to ensure that improvement strategies are consistently applied by all staff to drive improvement more rapidly.

Because the school has focused on improving areas of underperformance and there is a trend of improvement in some areas, despite a few remaining weaknesses, the school has made satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

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

Steve Isherwood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place 2 February 2010**

- Increase the rate of progress for the more able pupils by:
  - ensuring that all work provided for them is well matched to their needs and challenging
  - providing many more opportunities for them to develop and use their basic literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects, most particularly in problem solving and investigative work.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching to a consistently good standard, particularly in writing by:
  - ensuring a consistent approach to target- setting and marking
  - making the monitoring and evaluation of teaching more focused on pupils' progress and learning.
  
- Improve the quality of school self-evaluation by:
  - sharpening the focus on pupils' outcomes
  - providing subject coordinators with many more opportunities to monitor and evaluate their subjects
  - ensuring that the governing body has the necessary procedures on which to base its independent checks and evaluations.