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22 June 2011

Mrs A Drummond
Headteacher
Newtown Community Primary School
Newtown Road
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA2 7LW

Dear Mrs Drummond,

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors for giving time to discuss the school's improvements with me and to the Year 6 pupils I talked with during the visit.

As a result of the inspection on 9 November 2009, the school was asked to tackle 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' achievement is not improving quickly enough. Evidence in the books of many pupils, at both key stages, indicates that pupils' progress since the beginning of the school year has not always been good enough in writing and in mathematics. Over this period, improvement for many pupils has been barely satisfactory and, for a significant minority, progress has been inadequate. Teachers are not ambitious enough for pupils. Despite pupils being eager learners, the expectations of staff and pupils of how much work will be completed in a lesson are too low because the headteacher does not set challenging enough targets for improvement. Pupils' learning has improved most in reading since the previous inspection because a programme to teach letters and sounds has been introduced across the school. This, together with the special educational needs co-ordinator's drive to improve reading through targeted interventions, is giving pupils more confidence to tackle new words both in their reading and their writing. Pupils' attainment remains very low at both key stages and shows no trend of improvement since the previous inspection. Currently, just over one third only of Year 6 pupils is predicted to reach the expected level for their age in national tests and, of the remainder, too many are at the level expected of seven-year-olds.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Core subject leaders in English and mathematics have not been supported sufficiently by the headteacher to develop their roles effectively or to enhance their skills since the last inspection. They have had no specific leadership training which has enabled them to focus on the most important areas for improvement, nor are they given regular, dedicated time to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils in their subject. When monitoring does occur, sometimes in the teachers' unpaid time, it is not sufficiently directed by the headteacher nor is it based on an effective strategic plan for improvement. The result has been a piecemeal approach to evidence gathering which does not focus the work of subject leaders sufficiently on finding the most significant barriers to good progress for all pupils regardless of their ability. Much hard and conscientious work by subject leaders is having little or no effect on raising attainment. There is no evidence of action by the school to create a structured approach to the performance management of support staff since the last inspection, though some teaching assistants have acquired higher level teaching assistant status since then. The work of teaching assistants is not formally monitored by any member of staff nor do they have a designated line manager to evaluate the impact of their work, set targets or identify their professional development needs. Despite this, teaching assistants have had a positive impact on improvements. Through liaison with the special educational needs co-ordinator they identified the potential for a more comprehensive programme of letters and sounds in all year groups to improve pupils' ability to sound out words to assist both their reading and writing. Because of the lack of management structure for teaching assistants, the school has only patchy knowledge of the effectiveness of the interventions and support programmes that they run.

There has been too little improvement to pupils' attendance since the last inspection. Currently attendance for this year is 90.8% for all pupils of statutory school age. At the time of this monitoring inspection, there were 16 pupils whose attendance was below 80%, which amounts to about one in six of the school's population. The impact of this regular and, in some cases, chronic non-attendance is strikingly obvious in the books of poor attenders, where discontinuity makes learning inadequate and for the most severe cases creates a downward spiral of detachment from school. While the teacher in charge of attendance has implemented a raft of incentives and rewards to promote better attendance and draw hard-to-reach families into school, the figures show there has been little impact from any of the initiatives. Nor has close liaison with the local authority welfare officer to support families to improve their children's attendance yielded any significant changes to the attendance of the poorest attenders. Members of the governing body have a limited role in supporting the school to improve attendance. Since the last inspection, governors have not formed a committee charged with monitoring the school's progress on this issue, nor have governors routinely had contact with the parents of the poorest attenders. The school's capacity to bring about improvement on this crucial issue is seriously hampered by a number of factors. These include: the absence of an effective strategic plan, a lack of concerted effort by members of the governing body and the school, an over-reliance on the efforts of the teacher in charge to resolve the issues and no system for monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives.

Staff have developed the curriculum since the previous inspection to give pupils a broader picture of the cultural diversity of Britain. A range of visits and visitors is helping to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the society in which they live, so that they have a better understanding of their own and other communities.

The local authority has given satisfactory support in helping the school to raise standards and improve attendance since the time of the last inspection, by providing consultancy support in English and mathematics and the services of the Education Welfare Officer. However, despite support for teachers to improve curricular planning, this has had little impact because the school has not made the best use of guidance through a concerted approach led from the top.

The inspection has raised very serious concerns. These will be considered by the appropriate Regional Director, Inspection Delivery, who will decide when the school will next be inspected.

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 Moira Fitzpatrick
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 9 November 2009

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
 - developing the leadership skills of some key leaders further in order to drive improvement even more rapidly
 - providing a more structured approach to the management of the performance of support staff.

- Continue to support the rising trend in attendance by:
 - targeting efforts on an even broader range of pupils and their families when attendance starts to slip.

- Improve the effectiveness of community cohesion by:
 - providing opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of people from a greater variety of different cultures, including those within modern-day British society.