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22 September 2011

Mrs L McDonald
Headteacher
Holm Cultram Abbey CofE School
Abbey Town
Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 4RU

Dear Mrs McDonald,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Holm Cultram Abbey CofE School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 21 September 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 of the Governing Body, local authority adviser, staff and pupils who spoke with me.

As a result of the inspection on 28 and 29 June 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.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are in line with or below those expected for their age. Past results indicate that the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress across the three mixed-age classes to attain broadly average levels at the end of each Key Stage. However pupils' achievement has been lower in mathematics than it has in English in recent years. The school has taken appropriate action to halt this trend and attainment in mathematics improved considerably in 2011. Standards of attainment in writing were lower and teachers recognise that they need to ensure attainment in English is sustained while they focus attention on mathematics.

All staff have shown drive and commitment to improve the quality of teaching. They have welcomed support from local authority advisers and have been keen to extend their skills through professional development. The use of assessment has been a key focus since the last inspection. There is now a more consistent approach to assessing mathematics and the way in which information is passed from class to class. Several other initiatives are at early stages and there has not been sufficient time to embed the most effective practice in all three classes. The assessment leader has introduced some effective practice into her class in marking and setting pupils' goals, which could be extended across the school.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The use of assessment to plan and reinforce learning during lessons is variable. Some good practice was observed, for example in a mathematics lesson where pupils were continuing number sequences. Tasks were effectively differentiated to ensure pupils of all ability were provided with challenge, based on their prior learning. However, there are occasions when older, more able pupils are not engaged in whole class sessions. This is because introductions to lessons do not provide sufficient stimulation or arouse pupils' curiosity and desire to learn more. In some cases, teachers go over knowledge and understanding that the older pupils have already acquired. Pupils have a good attitude to learning and are fully attentive when they find activities interesting, but they find it difficult to sustain concentration during these sessions.

Pupils appreciate teachers' 'good sense of humour' but say that they would like more opportunities for practical learning, investigation, debate and creative arts. The use of such approaches and the use of more exciting stimuli such as audio, visual and practical resources to enhance teaching are currently limited. Pupils behave well in lessons and show perseverance when faced with a challenge. Pupils are similarly considerate, polite and kind to each other in communal areas. Their welcoming behaviour and the caring approach of staff creates a friendly environment where all feel safe. Pupils who have special educational needs or are falling behind are particularly well supported through additional small group or individual tuition.

The headteacher is taking appropriate action to move the school forward. Staff are supportive and fully committed to bringing about improvements. Due to the small size of the school, all staff, including the headteacher have several areas of responsibility as well as a teaching commitment. Staff have been keen to take advantage of professional development opportunities to enhance their leadership skills. Consequently, they are now in a position to collectively review their role in leading and monitoring initiatives. Whole school systems to record and monitor pupils' progress and attainment have evolved over time and contain much helpful information. However the records are due for revision so that they provide a succinct overview of pupils' progress which teachers can use to inform planning and leaders can use to monitor progress. The Chair of the Governing Body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. The local authority has provided good support to help staff develop skills and build capacity within the school.

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

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and improve achievement in mathematics by ensuring that work for pupils attaining higher levels is always challenging
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better across the school by:
 - Ensuring that the assessment of pupils by questioning during lessons is used consistently across the school
 - Ensuring that marking of pupils' work helps them to know how to improve
 - Ensuring that activities build effectively on pupils' past work, challenge their thinking and consolidating their learning.