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8 December 2011

Mr J Ditchburn
Headteacher
Ashfield Junior School
High Street
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 4ES

Dear Mr Ditchburn

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Ashfield Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 December 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the local authority representatives, Chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils who gave up their time to talk to me about the school.

There have been a few staffing changes since the last inspection. The substantive headteacher returned to school in September 2011 following a period of absence. During this absence, the deputy headteacher was acting as headteacher with support from the headteacher of a partner school. One member of staff has joined the school on a temporary secondment and one teacher has returned part time following maternity leave.

As a result of the inspection on 28 March 2011, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils enter the school in Year 3 with above average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment at the end of Year 6 has been in line with the national average for a number of years but below expected levels, given pupils' higher than average starting points. Attainment improved in 2011, halting a downward trend. Pupils' books show that the majority have made at least expected progress in their work since the start of this academic year. They are making brisker progress than previously because teaching has improved and there are more-effective systems to track how well they are doing. However, their attainment is still lower than it should be because of disrupted and inadequate teaching in the past.

It was not possible to evaluate lessons in all year groups during the inspection because many teachers and pupils were out of school on a pre-arranged visit to the theatre. However, a full scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with them indicated that progress in

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learning has quickened. Teachers are accurately assessing work to help pupils build on their prior attainment. Work is more accurately matched to pupils' knowledge and skills on entry to Year 3 because of improvements to transition arrangements with the associated infant school. The school recognises that there is more to be done to further this transition work. Nevertheless, pupils are beginning to make more-rapid progress from their starting points. Pupils' workbooks across the whole school generally show appropriate levels of challenge for those of different ability, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lessons were observed in Year 6, where pupils worked with a high degree of independence. They made good use of 'Level Up' prompt cards to help them plan writing and showed stamina and perseverance in completing extended pieces.

Learning targets and marking are being used more effectively to help pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. However, there are inconsistencies in approach to marking and self or peer assessment. For example, the use of concise and clear success criteria very effectively enables pupils to check their own work and self-correct in some classes but this is not common practice across the whole school. Where 'improvement time' is set aside, it very effectively enables pupils to reflect on their work and follow up on verbal feedback and marking.

During the course of the day the inspector spoke with a large number of pupils. These pupils were fully aware of their learning targets and how to achieve higher levels in their work. They were enthusiastic ambassadors for their school and reported that lessons had become more challenging and interesting since the school was last inspected. Their eagerness and positive attitudes are strong factors in their achievement. This enthusiasm for learning is reflected in their above average attendance and full participation in after-school activities. They feel safe in school and are confident that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with quickly and appropriately.

Processes for monitoring and evaluation have become more systematic. The involvement of senior and subject leaders in monitoring and evaluation is developing well with the support of the headteacher from a partner school. There are clear action plans to support the development of literacy and numeracy, underpinned by professional development. Lesson observations, scrutiny of planning and pupils' work as well as discussions with pupils are providing leaders and the governing body with a more-accurate understanding of the school's performance and this is starting to inform improvement planning. Half-termly meetings between senior leaders and each teacher to analyse pupils' progress are proving effective in setting teaching and learning targets. Teachers and senior leaders are aware of pupils who are underachieving or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that targeted support can be provided. However, developments are at early stages and have not had a full impact on the quality of provision. Some of the evaluations do not clearly define why some practice is more effective or the next steps that need to be taken to move satisfactory practice to good.

The local authority's statement of action met requirements. It has provided good support to the school, including additional support from the headteacher of a local school, during the

absence of the substantive headteacher. This has helped the school develop leadership capacity among the senior team and subject leaders. The local authority is appropriately scaling down the level of support as capacity develops in the school.

I hope that you have found the visit 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 March 2010

- Raise attainment particularly in reading, writing and mathematics and increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - sharing the good and outstanding practice that already exists
 - always providing learning that is appropriately challenging for all groups of pupils
 - giving pupils independent learning tasks as early as possible in lessons to maximise the opportunity for teachers to check how well individuals are learning
 - always providing clear success criteria so that pupils themselves can assess how well they are learning.

- Sharpen the school's monitoring and evaluation to enable leaders and managers to have a more accurate view of pupils' learning and progress by:
 - focusing closely on learning and on the previous areas for development when observing lessons
 - having clear action plans in literacy and numeracy to ensure that pupils learn basic skills securely and are able to apply them to everyday contexts
 - always providing succinct and clear summary evaluations of monitoring and evaluation so that the governing body has a shared understanding of how well the school is doing.