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Mr M Faulkner
The Headteacher
Bearbrook Combined School
Fowler Road
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Dear Mr Faulkner

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Bearbrook Combined School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 January 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body and school improvement adviser as well as to your pupils, who gave me good insight into life in the school.

Since the last inspection, the school's leadership has been restructured with the appointment of four lead learners at middle leadership level and one to the senior team from within the school. The school took over the management of Bearbrook Pre-School in November 2011, which has provision for forty three- to four-year-olds. The number of children admitted into Reception in September 2011 increased from 60 to 90; this is a temporary increase to meet the need for school places locally. Three new teachers have been appointed including one to teach the children in the additional Reception class. Building work, to help accommodate the increased numbers, begins in March and is due for completion by September 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 30 November and 1 December 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.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment on entry to Reception is below average. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2011 was again below the current floor targets, although results did improve on the previous year so that attainment in English and mathematics was

closer to the national average. However, there was underachievement for some pupils, in particular those of middle ability and most significantly in mathematics. This lower performance was due to previous poor teaching lower down the school and, as the school recognises, insufficient preparation for the tests. The school has acted rapidly to address this underachievement in mathematics, for example through developing teachers' expertise, addressing gaps in pupils learning, interventions such as one-to-one tuition and frequent opportunities to answer test questions. This has impacted significantly on current pupils' progress in mathematics so that most pupils are now making accelerated progress and the gap between the low attainment at the end of Year 5 and the national average is steadily closing. Inspection evidence shows that progress for pupils in lower year groups is improving rapidly. Significant improvement in progress in writing has been secured since the last inspection for all groups of pupils, including those who are learning to speak English as an additional language and those of higher ability.

The quality of teaching

Evidence from short visits and longer lesson observations, the school's own records and the scrutiny of pupil work show that most of the prior weaknesses noted in teaching in Years 1 to 6 have been successfully addressed. As a result, teaching is now stronger. Monitoring of teaching is both frequent and accurate so that the school has identified areas for improvement and systematically addresses them. This process is now extending to the newly appointed lead learners who are working with their teams to share good practice and ensure consistency, for example in the use of mathematical language across the school. Notable improvements have been made in the quality of planning to meet the needs of different groups within lessons, and there is now consistency in what is taught across classes within year groups. Other strengths in teaching include: the appropriate pitch of lessons; the use of questioning to promote good learning; well targeted resources and activities for different groups; and, opportunities for active and independent learning. Sometimes the pace of learning slows when teachers do not provide sufficient visual prompts to aid pupils' understanding. On occasions, plenaries are not sufficiently focused to consolidate learning and leave pupils less well prepared for the next lesson. The quality of marking has improved significantly. All teachers are marking frequently and providing helpful comments to pupils on how to improve. Most, but not all, are also providing challenges for pupils to respond to; this is particularly valued by pupils who see these as helping them to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved since the last inspection as result of better teaching, improvements in the curriculum, and more consistent and precise marking. Pupils explained clearly how the assessment ladders, the targets they set for improvement with their teachers in mathematics and English and the comments from teachers on their work are helping them to make better progress. Pupils are

now supporting each other well in lessons, helping them to develop as independent learners and school data indicate improvements in behaviour in and out of lessons.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

School leaders, including those new in post, have shown determination in addressing the issues raised at the last inspection and in working to raise the achievement of all pupils. This has been communicated well to all staff who are now increasingly involved in school self-evaluation and action planning. Data about pupils' attainment and progress are being used with increasing effectiveness to differentiate teaching, identify underachievement and evaluate the impact of actions, such as improving pupils' spelling and writing skills in Years 1 to 6. The school's plans for raising attainment are highly focused on improving both teaching and attainment, although the success criteria and evaluation of the impact of actions are not always measured in relation to pupils' achievement. Nonetheless, senior leaders have successfully focused on different aspects in each term, for example in the autumn term it was raising attainment in mathematics. The pre-school is rapidly being integrated into the school. Strengths and areas for development have already been identified and the well-established good practice of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception classes is beginning to be established.

To help support improvement, selective and purposeful use is made of external consultants. For example, members of the Intensive Support Programme team are supporting the rapid improvement in mathematics and the school improvement adviser assisted with the leadership restructuring. Another external consultant has helped to sharpen the school's systems for monitoring the impact of actions. As a result, the school's capacity for further improvement is strengthening.

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

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is always good in Years 1 to 6 by:
 - monitoring teaching effectively, identifying areas for improvement and evaluating effectiveness
 - sharing the good practice that is already in school
 - checking that teachers' planning and delivery of lessons address the needs of different abilities within each class
 - checking that teachers' marking informs pupils of what they need to do to improve and reach their targets
 - developing writing skills in Years 1 to 6 through focusing on improving basic sentence construction, letter formation, spelling and presentation in literacy lessons and in other subjects
 - enabling senior leaders and middle managers to become more proficient in identifying strengths and weaknesses in what is being taught in their subject areas through looking at pupils' work.