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14 March 2012

Mrs L Wade
Headteacher
Kirkby Stephen Primary School
Nateby Road
Kirkby Stephen
Cumbria
CA17 4AE

Dear Mrs Wade

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Kirkby Stephen Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 March 2012. Please also thank the pupils who were so keen to talk to me about their school.

Since the last inspection one teacher has left and a newly qualified teacher has joined the school. A second newly qualified teacher is currently covering the post of a teacher on maternity leave. The deputy headteacher was appointed immediately before the last inspection in January 2011. The literacy and special educational needs coordinators took up their responsibilities in September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 9 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 has made good progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection. Standards of attainment are rising and current pupils' progress is accelerating in all year groups. In 2011, results in national tests taken by Year 6 pupils rose markedly and were broadly average in both English and mathematics. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 now shows, albeit from a low base, an upward trend. Although the most recent teacher assessments for pupils in Key Stage 1 were lower than those of the previous year, this reflects the ability of a cohort of whom almost half were disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. These pupils, like those in other year groups, are now making better progress because teaching is improving. New strategies for teaching of reading and writing are now being consistently implemented across the school and consequently standards of attainment are rising. The school's most recent progress data shows that current pupils in Year 6 are on track to reach their targets this year. Gaps in pupils' learning, which were a legacy of previously weaker

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teaching, have been identified and are now being closed. The expertise of new staff is being well deployed and good practice shared more widely. As at the time of the previous inspection, attendance remains above average and pupils' behaviour is good, both of which continue to have a positive impact on their learning.

The quality of teaching

The school's self-evaluation and lessons seen during the inspection both confirm that the proportion of good teaching across the school is increasing. Teachers are making better use of varied resources, setting tasks which present a greater challenge and successfully encouraging their pupils to become more resilient, independent learners. Whole-school phonics (the sounds that letters make) teaching and the use of fresh approaches to extended writing and shared reading are becoming embedded in the school's work. Older pupils say that they are now enjoying learning more because lessons are fun, there are more practical activities and they are encouraged to find out things for themselves. Evidence from work in pupils' books and that displayed on walls, confirms that pupils now have increased opportunities to practise their basic skills, learn independently and produce creative artwork across a range of exciting topics as varied as 'space' and 'pirates'. Assessment of pupils' work in both English and mathematics has improved and is now being better used to inform planning of future lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils, as at the time of the last inspection, have good attitudes to learning and behave well in classrooms and around the school. Teachers now share their good practice more widely so that in all classes there is a consistent approach to managing behaviour and pupils are very clear about what is expected of them. The school's strategies to further improve behaviour and promote good social and moral development are working well. Older pupils are encouraged to provide good role models for younger children. Mixed-age seating for lunch, shared reading, playground buddies and an effective school council made up of pupils of all ages are examples of pupils' increasing willingness to take responsibility and care for each other. Pupils say they feel safe and ensuring this is the case remains a high school priority.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

Since the last inspection, the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers have been clarified. The roles are now developing rapidly and the work of senior leaders, who are well supported by the whole staff team, is contributing significantly to the school's growing capacity for further improvement. The recently appointed deputy headteacher, leader of literacy and special educational needs coordinator are all bringing increased energy and expertise to their areas of responsibility. Monitoring and self-evaluation are now more effective, and good practice, for example, in the teaching of phonics, is shared through training sessions for all staff. Staff feel they are well supported in their new roles and currently have access to high quality professional development to enhance their leadership

skills. The clear leadership of the headteacher and members of the governing body ensure that all pupils and members of the staff team feel valued and that their views are listened to. Consequently, pupils' enjoyment of learning has increased and morale has risen since the last inspection.

Communications with parents and carers continue to improve. Newsletters are now sent to parents and carers more frequently, are written in a very accessible format, and are lively and informative. Shared home-school books give parents and carers better opportunities to support their children's learning.

The headteacher and members of the governing body are appreciative of the good support that has been provided by the local authority. Regular meetings with school advisors have helped the school to monitor and evaluate the impact of improvements being made and ensure self-evaluation is accurate.

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

Ann Ashdown
Additional inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011

- Raise standards further in all year groups by:
 - embedding the systems and teaching strategies that have been implemented recently and monitoring their impact
 - ensuring the most effective practice is shared
 - developing cross-curricular links and opportunities to develop key skills, creativity and independent learning across the curriculum.
- Clarify and develop leadership roles and responsibilities to make the best use of staff expertise and skills.
- Improve communication with parents and carers so that all feel they are able to engage fully with the school and are well informed about their children's progress and the school's achievements.