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Mrs L Marsden
Headteacher
Confederation of Bilsdale Midcable Chop
Gate and Carlton and Faceby CE Primary
Schools
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Dear Mrs Marsden

Ofsted survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 15 and 16 November to look at the leadership of the federation.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of leadership to sustain improvement in all schools in the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without their agreement.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, the school improvement partner and pupils; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Context

The two primary schools were confederated in 2003 and were the first schools in North Yorkshire to be so. Both schools are very small and at the time of confederation, there was an unfilled vacancy for the post of headteacher at Carlton and Faceby. The headteacher at Bilsdale took over

leadership of both schools. During the last two years, there have been a number of changes to staffing. A new headteacher was appointed to the confederation who took up post in November 2009. Both schools have two mixed-age classes, one for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and the second for pupils in Key Stage 2. Pupils are taught separately in their own schools from Monday to Thursday each week. Every Friday, all pupils are taught together at Carlton and Faceby. The confederation experiences higher than average inward mobility of pupils who join at times other than the start of the year. An independent pre-school nursery is located at Carlton and Faceby.

Outcomes

- As a result of effective teamwork across the confederation, pupils achieve well and there is no discernible difference in their progress at the two schools. This is because teachers have an excellent understanding of pupils' individual learning needs and are skilful at adapting the improved curriculum to provide the necessary challenge and support for mixed-age groups at both schools. This is particularly the case for pupils who join one of the schools at times other than the start of the year; these pupils settle quickly and make swift progress relative to their starting points.
- Outcomes for children who complete the Early Years Foundation Stage have been consolidated and improved upon since the last inspection of each school. Children make rapid progress towards early learning goals, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development because of the weekly opportunities to meet with other children. They also experience a greater variety of learning opportunities because of improvements to both indoor and outdoor provision.
- Pupils enjoy being part of a confederation and value highly what it has to offer them. They are very enthusiastic about the way in which they work together each week in lessons and also recognise that by being 'two schools that are one family', they are able to take part in team sports against other schools and enjoy more activities such as weekly joint visits to the local swimming pool. The joint school council ensures that pupils from each school receive the same opportunities and are able to influence decision-making about improvements to their school.
- Pupils' behaviour and consideration to each other are of a consistently high standard across the confederation because high expectations are consistently communicated. Parents report that their children have grown in confidence because of the extended opportunities offered through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities that are provided by the confederation.

Provision

- As a result of joint curriculum planning across the confederation, provision has improved and become more relevant and exciting for pupils. Staff use

their subject expertise and knowledge of pupils very effectively to adjust programmes of study to enable pupils to achieve well.

- Pupils interviewed were keen to explain that they all learn new things from Monday to Thursday and are then able to practise what they have learnt in new ways together on Friday in their bigger groups. This reflects the high quality of joint lesson planning and delivery that increases the level of challenge across the confederation, for example in literacy and numeracy.
- The curriculum has been further enriched with a broader range of subjects as a result of the confederation, including specialist teaching in modern foreign languages and music. The opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports have also been extended significantly and increase pupils' enjoyment of school.
- The excellent quality of care and support underpins the success of the confederation. This has been strengthened further over the last year because staff now work together as one team within the confederation. Parents are confident that all teachers know their child well because information is shared regularly between the two schools. Pupils report that their experiences in the confederation are helping them to become more confident about the move to a much larger secondary school.

Leadership and management

- You have built very effectively on the existing strengths in the confederation and united the two schools to become one community. You have inspired a relatively new staff team to adopt a fresh approach to embedding the impact of the confederation in pupils' outcomes. Leaders feel empowered to make best use of their skills and expertise and are driving improvement towards challenging targets at an impressive rate. A particular strength of the staff team lies in their ability to respond quickly to pupils' changing needs in their short- and medium- term planning.
- Leaders at all levels have responsibilities within their school and across the confederation. They are very clear about school priorities and use regular updates of pupils' progress to check that their needs are being met. They value the regular professional dialogue that enables assessment to be moderated accurately and innovative ideas to be shared across the confederation. Leaders have also responded quickly to relative weaknesses identified in mathematics at Key Stage 2 and made effective use of local authority consultant support to close gaps in pupils' learning.
- All staff are involved in strategic planning and are held rigorously to account for their area of responsibility. Processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken are well established and improving because of joint working across the confederation. However, leaders recognise that this process would be enhanced further by focusing all staff even more sharply on the impact of improved provision on different groups of pupils.

- Opportunities for continuing professional development have been extended as a result of confederation arrangements and have resulted in improvements to provision, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Resources are shared and used very effectively. Staff and governors have worked together to purchase modern technical aids to support curriculum development that benefits all pupils across the confederation.
- The governing bodies of the two schools have combined since your appointment in 2009, which reflects their aim to maximise the benefits of the confederation without losing the distinct characteristics of each school. You and representatives of the governing body have welcomed and valued the support provided by the local authority as you explore the benefits of becoming a federation. Governors have been very sensitive to the concerns of some members of the wider community about the implications of possible federation and anxieties have largely been overcome.
- Parents report that the positive role played by the confederation within the wider community is better understood and valued. The parent–teacher associations of both schools have recently united to organise a confederation Christmas Fair. Partnerships with other providers and external agencies have been extended further. This includes links with the independent nursery that offer a smooth transition for children joining either of the two schools within the confederation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpen the focus on the impact of improved provision on different groups of pupils.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector