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9 May 2013

Mrs Linda Smith  
Headteacher  
Blackford CofE Primary School  
Blackford  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA6 4ES

Dear Mrs Smith

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Blackford CofE Primary School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013.

#### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the literacy leader, representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. Governing Body meeting minutes, school improvement plans and pupil progress tracking records were evaluated. The inspector visited all classrooms and spoke with staff and pupils.

#### **Context**

There have been no changes to staffing or the school's context since the last inspection.

#### **Main findings**

The headteacher has developed an appropriate short term action plan to address the areas that require improvement. It is well organised and shows clearly what will be done to quicken pupils' progress at Key Stage 1, develop the effectiveness of middle leaders and governors and improve pupils' attendance. Leaders are developing action plans for next year to build on the improvements that are already evident. They are aware that these plans will need to indicate how progress will be checked and how leaders and governors will evaluate the success of actions.

Governors are receiving good support from the local authority general adviser. They have attended training and arranged further school based support to develop their skills in checking progress and measuring the impact of new initiatives. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's priorities and are committed to securing necessary improvements.

Suitable steps are being taken to improve teaching and learning at Key Stage 1. For example, the use of 'prompt cards' is helping pupils to tackle challenging mathematical problems with more independence. The introduction of a new scheme is promoting a more systematic approach to the teaching of reading and writing. Pupils are enjoying their new reading books and the increased opportunities for writing. Regular planning meetings between teachers and teaching assistants are ensuring that group activities build on pupils' previous learning more successfully. Pupils also have clearer guidance to help them improve their work and move onto the next steps.

Such developments are helping pupils to make better progress in mathematics and English at Key Stage 1. The main priorities now, are to enable children to get off to a more rapid start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and ensure that they continue to build on their knowledge and skills as they transfer to Year 1. In particular, it is important to make sure that the activities children select for themselves are challenging enough to promote further learning.

Strengthened partnership working with local schools is enabling staff to share effective practice with colleagues. Middle leaders are receiving good quality training and coaching to develop their skills in lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and action planning. The literacy leader has put together a useful subject leader file.

The headteacher has introduced rigorous procedures to reduce persistent absence and holiday taking during term time. Measures to follow up absence are reducing the level of unauthorised absence. Pupils say they enjoy school and they think adults and pupils are friendly and kind. They are confident that teachers will help them if they are struggling with their work.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- Make sure that the new action plan shows how progress will be checked and how the impact of initiatives will be evaluated, making governors' roles clear.
- Ensure children make rapid progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and review systems to track pupils' progress as they transfer to Year 1.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The local authority general adviser is providing good support to develop governors' skills. Staff are benefitting from a range of external support including attendance at training courses and strengthened partnership working with local schools. The headteacher is pursuing a Christian leadership course with the Diocese.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

**Her Majesty's Inspector**