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Nigel Isaac  
Coniston Primary School  
Epney Close  
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BS34 5LN

Dear Mr Isaac

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Coniston Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan, visit notes from local authority officers, minutes of governing body meetings and pupil data were evaluated.

### **Context**

There have been a number of changes to the school staff since the inspection. The special educational needs co-ordinator left in April. An experienced leader is covering this post until September 2013. The deputy headteacher became a class teacher in April. One teacher has left on maternity leave. The acting deputy headteacher and a Year 2 teacher are leaving in September. A new leadership team comprising of a newly appointed deputy headteacher and Key Stage 2 leader will join the school in September. Four governors have left their posts and are yet to be replaced.

## **Main findings**

Training for all staff, on asking effective questions in lessons, is improving teaching and pupils' attitudes to learning. This approach is stretching the more able pupils and leading to more searching lines of enquiry, such as in Year 5 where pupils are investigating mathematics in art and nature. New procedures for setting writing targets for pupils are leading to a better match of activities to pupils' academic needs. This is also helping teachers plan more carefully for pupils' next steps in their learning and pupils are more aware of what they need to do next to improve their writing.

A new monitoring cycle has resulted in a 'cultural shift' where all staff know their work will be routinely checked. Pupil progress meetings, held every six weeks, are holding staff to account for the performance of pupils in their class. Paired observations by teachers are resulting in a greater professional dialogue between staff about learning. Opportunities to reflect on practice and re-shape lesson activities are now linked carefully to staff meeting feedback sessions. Each staff meeting now relates directly to an aspect of the 'teacher standards', links to training and contains clear expectations and follow up actions for all staff. However, progress in improving the quality of teaching faster has been hampered by the large number of changes in staffing.

The school development plan clearly identifies specific aspects that are needed to improve in teaching and learning. This is a real strength of the plan. Precise details for leaders and managers to improve are less strong. The headteacher intends to revise this part of the plan with the new leadership team.

Governors have improved their effectiveness in holding the school to account. Subject leaders are now reporting to governing body committees regarding their work in the school. Attendance by the chair of governors at the local authority termly review enables detailed discussions to take place regarding the performance of the school. However, monitoring activities to check on the success of the school improvement plan or gather first hand evidence from the school lack a systematic, regular approach. These activities are often too reliant on a few core members.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- attend a national Ofsted conference 'Better English and mathematics
- review the school improvement plan so it states clearly what leaders and managers will do to improve their effectiveness. The plan should also; establish a clear timeline of steps to becoming a good school, articulate the

urgency and expectations precisely to staff and indicate how the governing body will monitor its implementation and progress

- ensure all governors collect first hand evidence regarding the work of the school
- governors should visit an outstanding governing body to gain ideas on how to effectively monitor the school improvement plan and holding the school to account.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school is benefitting from the high quality external support offered by the local authority. Training on using new mathematical apparatus is leading to new teaching methods and accelerating progress for those pupils who need to catch up on their learning. Guidance to staff in reception has enhanced the outdoor learning environment, making it more engaging to boys. The brokering of an additional staff member to lead developments in special educational needs is strengthening the school's leadership and is helping to improve the quality of the school. Altogether, support for teaching, leadership and management are starting to bring about improvements to the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for South Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**