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16 December 2013

Miss Leesa Osborn
Headteacher
Northside Primary School
Northside
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 1BD

Dear Miss Osborn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Northside Primary School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 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 October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- drive improvements in mathematics and literacy across all curriculum areas.
- monitor the consistency of actions being taken across the school to ensure maximum impact on pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with the deputy headteacher in your absence, other teachers, pupils, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plans and the monitoring of progress made since the previous inspection. I also looked at documents regarding the support offered by the local

authority and the governing body's monitoring records. I met with six pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 to talk about recent changes in the school and look at examples of their work. Mr O'Townson and I visited each classroom to meet pupils and staff and look at the improvements to teaching and the school environment put in place since the last inspection.

Context

Since the school was last inspected a new member of the teaching staff has been appointed to lead on the teaching of phonics. A new apprentice teaching assistant has also been employed

Main findings

You, the governors and staff are determined to ensure the school is good. The action plan focuses clearly on the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection and measures the impact of the actions you have already taken, and those you plan to take in the near future. You have appointed a new teacher to lead on the teaching of phonics, to develop a more structured approach across the school, so that more pupils achieve in the year 1 phonics screening test. Staff have been trained on the new programme of teaching phonics. Governors took part in this training and produced resources, such as flash cards, to be used in the school so they have a better awareness of the impact of the teaching of phonics on the pupils. Phonic skills' sessions each morning target the specific gaps in pupils' knowledge. As a result your pupils have already shown improvements in their ability to blend sounds and you are reviewing this each term to ensure this progress continues.

Training on effective lesson planning has taken place so teachers can improve the quality of the lessons by having clear, relevant learning outcomes which meet the needs of the pupils. Teachers are receiving coaching to reduce the number of missed learning opportunities in lessons and to check pupils' understanding regularly during lessons. Senior leaders have also targeted other schools where good practice occurs: for example with phonics, creativity and independence across all activities, for Northside teachers to experience when they visit these schools.

The school marking policy has been revised. You are conducting regular checks on pupils' books to make sure the policy is being applied consistently and pupils are aware of the need to reflect on their work and correct it independently. Pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve their work. However, pupils' books do not yet reflect the policy is consistently applied and corrections are not always done, or done independently. You have introduced weekly meetings with children, their teachers and senior leaders to encourage pupils to reflect on their progress and explain any problems they are having. This has raised awareness of where gaps need filling and enabled appropriate interventions to be put in place swiftly.

You have reorganised the pupils into smaller ability groups in mathematics to challenge them, through more demanding short term targets. These targets are regularly updated so pupils make rapid progress. You have evidence that this is starting to show improved results. Further work is needed to use every opportunity to embed mathematical and literacy skills consistently across the curriculum so that the impact on the pupils' progress is more rapid.

An attendance officer with specific responsibility monitors why children are not in school and has improved attendance by working closely and supportively with parents. Parents have a clear understanding of the expectations and robust systems are in place to improve attendance levels. As a result children now receive attendance awards which they really like. Pupils have a better understanding of the importance of being in school and not missing out on education.

Pupils were keen to tell me how much they enjoy coming to school and how things are improving – they especially like the new ipads, sports equipment and improved playground. They chatted enthusiastically about the school and feel a strong sense of commitment to their school community.

The governing body responded swiftly and incisively to the last inspection and has a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching so that pupils have the best opportunities to reach their full potential. Governors have been trained by the local authority to monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively and the governing body gives an appropriate balance of support and challenge to the school. Governors are well aware of the strengths of the school and the areas for development and a named governor is attached to each aspect of the rapid development plan to monitor progress. Governors are in school regularly to look at the impact of actions being taken: for example following a learning walk and book scrutiny they have a better understanding of the target setting in the school and the impact of the new marking policy. Their involvement in the school has enabled them to focus on development, for example: following an analysis of pupils' progress in spelling, punctuation and grammar they are aware that grammar skills have improved and that spelling needs to be developed. The governing body has confidence in the senior leaders of the school to make rapid and sustainable progress.

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 has been, and continues to be, well supported by the local authority. As a result the local authority knows the school well and is aware of the performance and the standards your pupils achieve. Half termly meetings are held in school with the local authority to check on progress in all areas and support the school. The local authority has given training to your governors. Staff have received coaching and

been trained on the delivery of mathematics and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result you have already see an improvement in the quality of teaching, however, this improvement needs to be on-going and firmly embedded across the school before it impacts on the outcomes for pupils. You have made links with other schools to develop outstanding leadership and improve the quality of teaching. You are determined to also use and widen these links with other schools to help you promote the school as a place of learning for the whole school community.

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

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector