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6 October 2014

Mrs Fiona Newton  
Headteacher  
Askam Village School  
Lots Road  
Askam-in-Furness  
Cumbria  
LA16 7DA

Dear Mrs Newton

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Askam Village School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- make sure teaching enables pupils to reach age-related expectations identified in the new National Curriculum in each year group
- ensure that key writing skills and mathematical knowledge are secure at Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, so that pupils do not have gaps in their learning by the time they get to Year 5
- agree a timetable of monitoring and leadership activities for middle leaders.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a local authority representative, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited each classroom during lessons and looked at a sample of pupils' work with you. I spoke with pupils during lessons and at lunch-time. The school's action plans and latest achievement data were evaluated.

## **Main findings**

The school improvement plans address all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have acted quickly to make the recommended changes to systems and teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement. Staff and governors have been working hard to secure improvements over the last two years and are determined to secure a good outcome at the next inspection. There are signs of improvement, as detailed below. However, there has not been sufficient time to secure good achievement in assessments at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. In 2014 achievement at Key Stage 2 improved to broadly average levels in reading and mathematics but writing was well below average.

The systems to check pupils' progress are now consistent in each year group and are being used more effectively to identify pupils who are not making expected progress. Marking gives pupils precise advice on how to improve their work and provides additional challenge where relevant. The information from assessment and marking is being used well to plan 'focus groups' in class or additional small group support. This support is valued by pupils and helps them to resolve any misunderstandings immediately. Pupils also feel secure in asking for additional help if they are struggling.

Pupils are enjoying the focus on problem solving in mathematics, and this is a move in the right direction. During my visits to classrooms, I found pupils to be engaged in learning and keen to talk about what they were doing. They were persevering with some challenging tasks. However, pupils did not always understand what mathematical calculation was required and their lack of fluent mathematical knowledge, for example of number bonds and multiplication facts, was also impeding them. It is vital that mathematical knowledge and skills appropriate to age, are taught systematically at Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 so that pupils do not have large gaps in their knowledge by the time they get to Year 5.

Pupils' writing is a focus in school improvement planning and you are rightly focusing on key writing skills across all subjects. Pupils say they find it helpful to have all their writing in one book; it ensures that expectations are consistent from subject to subject and targets can be reinforced. Again, there is a need to make sure key writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation skills are secured in each year group from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. The focused spelling groups and more opportunities to write at length are supporting improvements in this area.

Middle leaders' roles are developing well with targeted support from local leaders of education and local authority advisers. Leaders are enthusiastic about the increased opportunities to lead training and promote initiatives in their subjects. They have many good ideas to make teaching more exciting and to involve parents. They have carried out some checks on pupils' progress and teaching but these are not yet planned regularly.

Governors are committed to improvement and keen to develop their skills. A review of governance is planned, which is appropriate to help them develop their role in challenging and supporting school leaders and evaluating the school's performance.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspections. We have agreed that a visit in the spring term or early summer term would be helpful, with a particular focus on key skills development across Key Stage 1 and lower Keys Stage 2.

### **External support**

The school is drawing effectively on available support. The local authority general adviser provides good support through training and supported review. You take full advantage of networking and training opportunities through the Furness Primary Collaborative of local schools and local subject leaders' networks. The link with a local leader of education is developing well and provides the basis for further school to school support.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**