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25 January 2008

Mrs Helen Wilson
Middlestone Moor Primary School
Rock Road
Spennymoor
County Durham
DL16 7DA

Dear Mrs Wilson,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for all your help when I visited your school on 24 January 2008. I was grateful for our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please thank all staff and pupils who found time to talk to me and help me get to know your school.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 28-29 September 2006, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of teaching to enable pupils to reach higher standards;
- ensure greater consistency in the tracking of pupils' progress;
- increase pupils' attendance.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The school's results in the 2007 national tests for 11-year-olds show that standards by Year 6 were average and that pupils' achievement was satisfactory. Standards improved significantly from the previous year, with a strong showing in mathematics and science. English improved slightly but was restricted by some weaknesses in writing which the school has already begun to address. Indications are that standards at Year 6 should be similar in 2008, or slightly better, as more pupils may reach the higher levels. This would represent good achievement for this year group; it has a high percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and their attainment in Year 2 was below average.

The school has done well to improve the quality of teaching. All teaching is at least satisfactory and much is good. There is no inadequate teaching. A new appointment and redeployment of teachers have helped to bring a freshness of approach and new ideas. Regular monitoring, especially by the headteacher, has been effective in highlighting areas to improve that reflect current priorities, such as assessment and differentiation. As a result, teachers are more vigilant in setting work that meets the need of pupils of all abilities, and expectations are higher. They increasingly use assessment data to influence their planning. All these attributes are having a direct benefit on pupils' achievement, including the more able pupils. However, there is still some inconsistency among teachers and the school has yet to explore ways to share the better practice throughout the school. The more effective teaching was typified by a brisker pace, more interesting subject matter and high expectations.

The school has introduced a very good tracking system that clearly identifies pupils' progress over time. Teachers are all now using data from this to guide their planning and influence their groupings of pupils in order that those who may be underachieving receive extra help. Classes also benefit from clear goals in literacy and numeracy so that pupils know what they have to learn at any given time. The new procedures are understandably taking some time to be implemented fully, but there are indications that standards are improving as a result. Pupils appreciate the informal guidance and marking in lessons; these are particularly effective in Year 6.

Attendance rates have risen appreciably as a result of the school's initiatives. They rose in 2006/07 to become average and were higher again last term. Improving attendance is a high priority for the school. A new reward system has resulted in pupils becoming very competitive, for example, in their quest to be the class with the best attendance for the year. The school has also achieved success by supporting individual families, working closely with the Education Welfare Officer and school nurse, as well as actively discouraging families from taking holidays in term-time.

Since the last inspection, the new headteacher has introduced many new systems to the school. Her businesslike approach has, according to governors, brought a brighter and more purposeful ethos; improvements include better communication with parents. The headteacher has ensured that all staff share her ideas and aspirations, and wisely has expanded the senior management team to fortify the school's development. The school has also benefited from good, additional support from the local authority, especially in improving teaching and learning in basic skills.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Scott".

Andrew Scott
Additional Inspector