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Mr Alan King
Furness Primary School
Furness Road
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Dear Mr King

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 November 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors for coming to meet me, to the pupils I met at lunchtime and to the School Improvement Partner.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes of staff. In all, nine teachers are new to the school. This includes four long-term supply staff recruited through an agency and one new to the teaching profession. The school has undergone works to improve the safety of the building and to refurbish the Early Years Foundation Stage. The latter includes new resources inside and the development of the outdoor provision.

As a result of the inspection on 11–12 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement in mathematics and science
- strengthen provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improve the effectiveness of its management to focus on improving the outdoor learning environment, teaching and assessment
- improve the quality of teaching so that more of it is good or better and work is matched more effectively to pupils' needs.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements. Some aspects are improving more quickly than others. Standards in mathematics and science remain low. Although the school's data show some pupils making accelerated progress, it remains variable across subjects and between classes. Pupils' books show improving progress in mathematics and some good quality marking to help them to improve. By comparison, science remains weaker. In particular, pupils' books show too few opportunities for investigative work and low expectations in some classes. At times, gaps in pupils' previous knowledge and skills hamper the speed at which they can grasp new mathematical and scientific concepts.

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Effective support from the local authority has helped to secure good improvement in strengthening provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The quality of interaction between adults and children is at least satisfactory and some is good. The new leader's analysis of children's starting points is helping to inform decisions about how to modify the provision to meet their needs. Secure systems for observing and assessing children's learning enable staff to track their progress towards the early learning goals. However, Nursery planning is not yet tightly focused on what children are expected to learn. In addition, the school does not meet statutory requirements for the number of qualified teachers in the Nursery.

The school is taking appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching through a balance of support and challenge. Training, support and coaching from local authority consultants and, increasingly, from senior staff are helping to identify specific areas for improvement for individual teachers. Visits to a number of lessons confirm the headteacher's view of teaching quality. His analysis of strengths and weaknesses in lessons observed jointly was accurate. There is a general acknowledgement that teaching is not yet consistently good enough to secure better and more consistent progress for pupils across the subjects. Pupils were engaged effectively when teaching gave them opportunities for practical tasks, chances to ask questions, to find things out, and to discuss their ideas with a partner. At times, learning was constrained by lack of resources and too much time spent listening to the teacher.

The school has made satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. School leaders have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and recognise that there is more to be done. They have set challenging targets for improvement. For example, an expectation has been set that 75% of pupils in each class will make better-than-expected progress over the coming year. Improved systems for gathering performance data and detailed analysis of pupils' progress are giving the school a sound basis for monitoring its progress towards that target. Termly meetings to evaluate the progress of each individual pupil serve to hold staff accountable for their pupils' achievement as well as identifying those pupils that might need more support or challenge. The local authority has worked hard to support the school to put in place the building blocks for further improvement. The School Improvement Partner provides an incisive commentary on the school's progress and robust challenge to influence improvements further.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector