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Mrs Wendy Edwards
Beamish Primary School and Nursery Unit
Co-operative Villas
Beamish
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 0QN

Dear Mrs Edwards,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 April 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please forward my thanks to your governor representative and your School Improvement Partner for meeting with me and to the pupils for their help during the visit.

Much has changed in relation to personnel since the time of the previous inspection and significant further changes are planned within the federation. The headteacher of the federation and the deputy headteacher of Beamish School both left at the end of the summer term 2009. The assistant headteacher from the federation school, Pelton Community Primary School, has assumed management responsibility for the day-to-day running of Beamish and is the Key Stage 2 teacher. A new headteacher of the federation started in January 2010 having formerly worked for two days per week supporting both schools during the autumn term as a national leader in education (NLE). Year group sizes remain very small ranging from one to eight pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. There are currently 40 children on part-time places in the Nursery. Very few have transferred through to the Reception Year in recent times, although there is a full uptake of places for September 2010 and this reflects a general rise in school numbers since the start of the academic year. A relatively high number of pupils join or leave the school during a key stage.

As a result of the inspection on 29 and 30 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve attendance
- raise standards in Key Stage 2

- monitor teaching across the school and share good practice seen in the school and federation
- use the information the school has on pupils to more rigorously check progress and to accurately meet the needs of pupils, particularly the more able.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The new headteacher has brought clarity of purpose and a secure focus on improving the quality of provision as the basis for raising standards. She enjoys the full support and commitment of the staff. Self-evaluation is accurate providing a clear sense of what requires improvement. Targets are more challenging and linked directly to heightened expectations of pupils' capabilities. The resources of the federation and from a national support school are being coordinated effectively to promote improvement.

Pupils' attendance has improved to broadly average and no pupils are persistently absent. Over the last two weeks there has been full attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school, say they feel safe and know that help is available should they need it. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning and enjoy working with others. Their behaviour is good with pupils showing responsibility and care towards each other. Pupils are proud of their school and talk enthusiastically about the much improved accommodation and resources.

Small year group numbers and a relatively high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make year-on-year comparisons of the school's performance difficult. At Key Stage 1, standards in writing, and more noticeably in mathematics, have risen since the previous inspection to above average. Standards in reading rose well in 2008 but declined in 2009 to below average. Results in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 have been consistently below average with significant year-on-year variations. Standards in English improved well in 2008, but declined in mathematics and science. Scores in mathematics and science improved in 2009, although English results showed a decline. At both key stages, not enough pupils are reaching the higher levels in the national tests. Given their starting points, pupils' achievement scores have been consistently within the average range since 2007. Inspection evidence confirms that as a consequence of the changes introduced, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making satisfactory progress.

Important changes have strengthened the accountability of teachers and improved their practice. A robust system to monitor teaching and learning is combined effectively with well-targeted training which is equipping teachers and support staff with the skills to improve their performance further. These measures are bringing about greater consistency so that teaching is now satisfactory and teachers are more confident about their practice.

Assessment and tracking routines are enabling the staff to monitor pupils' progress with increasing accuracy. This process is identifying pupils who are underachieving so that they can be targeted with additional support to help them to catch up. However, teachers are not yet using assessment information well enough when planning all lessons to ensure they take full account of the learning needs of all pupils. Where this occurs it is limiting the progress which some pupils are capable of making. The quality of feedback that pupils receive about their work has started to improve but this is not consistent across the school. At its best, pupils are offered clear information about how well they have done and are given specific information about how to make progress. However, too much marking is either celebratory or lacking detailed evaluation. Consequently, while pupils are mostly clear about their targets they are much less secure about what is required to reach them. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils' learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Unavoidable disruption to teaching assistant support for pupils at Key Stage 2 has reduced the time these staff spend directly working with pupils and is limiting their effectiveness in supporting learning.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure in meeting statutory requirements.

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

Tom Grieveson
Her Majesty's Inspector