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Mr Tim Barnes
Headteacher
Alkrington Primary School
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Dear Mr Barnes

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 April 2010 with Tim Vaughan HMI and for the information which you provided during my visit. I am also grateful to the Chair of Governors and the local authority for assistance with this visit.

As a result of the inspection on 8 – 9 October 2009, the school was asked to do the following.

- Accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 by:
 - raising the level and consistency of challenge they receive during lessons
 - raising expectations among all staff of what pupils can do
 - providing more-able pupils with work which is matched closely to their learning needs
 - reviewing and improving the teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Improve assessment practice in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 by:
 - ensuring that assessment is both regular and rigorous and informs teachers' planning effectively
 - embedding the monitoring of pupils' progress across the curriculum
 - further developing target setting to ensure that all pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve.



- Increase the influence of middle leaders in driving improvement by:
 - clarifying roles and developing procedures in relation to leading developments in the different subjects
 - ensuring that middle leaders are fully aware of the expectations the school has of them.

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

A period of much change and disruption in the leadership of the school following the previous inspection has severely limited the progress made on all key issues. Senior leaders and the local authority recognise that the pace of change has been too slow and, as a result, the school is behind schedule in meeting its targets for improvement.

Pupils' current work, as well as the school's own data, suggests that some pupils are making better progress than previously. However, too many pupils across the school, particularly the more able, are still not achieving as well as they should because the quality of teaching is too variable and the level of challenge in some lessons is too low. Too many pupils have gaps in their learning and their potential remains untapped. Although some good elements of teaching exist and improvements to the learning environment are clearly visible, in too many lessons pupils are passive, the pace of learning is slow, teachers over-direct and activities are not stimulating enough to engage pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Too many worksheets are used. Many of the tasks lack sparkle and are not well matched to pupils' abilities so that pupils are not stretched and challenged in their thinking. In addition, the understanding of what pupils can do and what they need to learn next is inconsistent in some classes. Consequently, staff do not all have an accurate view of the progress made by different groups of pupils and opportunities to plan challenging activities for pupils of different abilities are not always taken. This means that, all too often, tasks for higher-attaining pupils are not demanding enough and are restricted to composing a longer piece of writing, tackling a harder sum or completing another worksheet with insufficient attention given to the higher-order thinking skills that pupils need.

Improvements to the teaching of numeracy skills are beginning to emerge. For example, teachers are more confident in their subject knowledge with training and support. However, at present, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge in practical situations and there is an over-reliance on worksheets. Opportunities for pupils to think about different ways to tackle their work and investigate things for themselves are not consistently planned.



Pupils say they enjoy school. In the main, they have positive attitudes to their work and their behaviour has improved. Even when activities are less engaging, they concentrate well and try to do their best, although some report that certain activities are too easy.

The school has a new system in place for monitoring pupils' progress. A great deal of data is generated about how well pupils are achieving across the school. However, these changes are very recent and not all staff are confident in using the information to pinpoint the levels at which pupils are working accurately and in identifying the next steps for improvement. Consequently, there is little consistency in the use of assessment information and in the way that staff undertake assessments and involve pupils in the target-setting process. Staff are beginning to use marking more effectively, not only to praise and encourage pupils, but to help them to understand how to improve their work. However, this effective practice is not used consistently in all classes. There are not enough examples of marking that challenges individuals or evaluates how well previous guidance has been followed. As a result, pupils do not always act on the points made and repeat the same errors. In some books pupils' work is poorly presented and in other examples some pupils were performing tasks that were not at the appropriate level for their ability.

Through training and support, senior leaders have begun to develop the skills of middle managers by restructuring staffing, clarifying roles and making new appointments. However, this work is very recent and, as a result, has yet to manifest in actions capable of effecting substantial and sustained improvement.

The school is just beginning to move forward. Staff are working hard to improve their practice. However, at present, there is no shared vision or collective responsibility on how to improve the school and some staff are unsure about what is expected of them.

All parties acknowledge that much remains to be done to get the school back on track and that actions capable of making a demonstrable impact on accelerating pupils' progress have yet to be delivered by the senior leadership team.

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

Steve Isherwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

