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4 April 2011

Mr I Sheppard
Headteacher
Aycliffe Community Primary School
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Kent
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Dear Mr Sheppard

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Aycliffe Community Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 31 March 2011, for the time given to my telephone discussion with the deputy headteacher and for the information provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you could also thank the governing body, members of staff and the pupils.

There have been significant changes to the school context since the previous inspection. A new deputy headteacher took up post in September 2010 along with a new Early Years Foundation Stage teacher. The school is in a soft federation with four other primary schools.

As a result of the inspection on 18–19 November 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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

Historically, pupils' attainment has been low for the last five years at both key stages. Currently, attainment in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 is lower than at any time during the previous five years. Attainment in writing has dipped since the last inspection and, like reading, it is exceptionally low. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities underachieve. In addition the evidence shows that boys are also underachieving in reading and writing. Attainment in mathematics is higher than in English and continues to improve. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in national tests is below average in mathematics. In the



2010 national test results, no pupils gained the higher level in English. Boys and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to underachieve in English at Key Stage 2. Although the school's own tracking data demonstrate improvements in English, teacher assessments tend to be overly generous and predicted outcomes too high.

The quality of teaching and learning is variable and ranges from inadequate to good. It is not yet consistently good enough to make up for previous underachievement. Since September, teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved well and the children make good progress considering their very low starting points. Across the school, teachers do not yet use assessment information in lessons effectively enough to ensure that the work provided matches the needs of all learners. As a result, more-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently well to reach higher levels. In addition, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not supported effectively enough. In particular, teaching assistants are not always engaged with pupils and sit inactive for long periods of time in lessons. The leadership and management of teaching and learning have not been sharp enough to drive forward significant improvements in teaching. Judgments have not always been accurate and have not focused sufficiently well on achievement, learning and progress. As a result, leaders do not have a precise view of the quality of teaching and learning. Although there have been some progress meetings more recently, teachers are not held to account rigorously enough for the standards achieved by pupils or for the progress they make.

Marking is inconsistent across the school and between subjects. No action was taken following the previous inspection until very recently when a new 'criteria for marking' policy was introduced. There is currently no evidence of the impact of the new marking policy on raising standards. The sample of books looked at during the visit contain a degree of regular marking but the quality of written feedback is highly variable. Some comments are cursory while others adhere to the school's marking policy by highlighting the indicated foci in the policy. However, even when there are more detailed constructive comments, teachers do not follow them up to make sure pupils act upon them. Marking in science is less effective and the books show some pieces of unfinished work which also are not followed up.

Attainment in writing has improved but the amount of improvement is too little too late. There has been too little focus by the leadership team on raising the expectations of staff of what pupils can do. As a result, lessons do not always challenge pupils of all capabilities effectively enough. The literacy leader has worked hard to produce an action plan to bring about improvement but with little strategic direction from senior leadership. As a result, the action plan has not been evaluated for impact and insufficient time has been allocated to monitor progress against actions taken to bring about improvement. It is much the same situation in science where little action has been taken until this academic year to address the area for improvement from the previous inspection. A wide range of intervention strategies have been put into place to raise attainment in writing in particular but there has



been no rigorous evaluation of the impact of actions taken. Inspection evidence shows that some interventions are clearly accelerating learning but that others are having little if any impact, for example, to promote progress in spelling.

The science week went well and concentrated on investigation and experimentation but there is no evidence that this is being embedded into the day-to-day science curriculum. There is little in exercise books to show any investigative work beyond the science week.

The school has made some improvements, for example, attainment in mathematics continues to rise under the leadership and direction of the deputy headteacher. Attendance has also improved year-on-year over the last three years and current figures indicate it to be approaching broadly average levels. The levels of attainment reached by children in the Reception class are now much improved giving children a better start to their education. This indicates satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The school appreciates the valuable support the local authority provides and the support and challenge of the School Improvement Officer. The local authority is monitoring the school's work through its regular reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009

- Ensure that pupils achieve as well as possible by:
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information more effectively to plan pupils' learning and match activities to their needs, including challenge for more-able pupils
 - giving pupils more precise guidance through marking and feedback on how they can improve their work.

- Ensure that pupils make more rapid progress across the school and raise attainment in writing by:
 - improving spelling skills and providing pupils with a greater range of purpose for writing

- and in science by:
 - planning more investigative and problem-solving activities.