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Janet Dixon
Headteacher
Barrow Island Community Primary School
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Cumbria
LA14 2SJ

Dear Mrs Dixon

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 9 February 2010 and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the children who spoke to me and the Chair of the Governing Body who took time out at short notice to come into the school to meet with me.

Since the inspection on 10 and 11 June 2009 the substantive deputy headteacher has taken maternity leave. There is currently an acting deputy headteacher in post. As a result of that inspection, the school was asked to:

- Provide further training for staff for safeguarding pupils and ensure that relevant policies are fully up-to-date.
- Raise standards (attainment) and improve achievement in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 2 by improving the consistency in the levels of challenge and pace in teaching.
- Develop a more consistent approach to marking to help pupils understand what they have to do to improve.
- Strengthen the role of the senior staff and governors in their monitoring and evaluation of raising standards.

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

Provisional data for pupils' performance in the 2009 tests, taken around the time of the last inspection, record a modest improvement in overall attainment by the end of Key Stage 2, although attainment was still low and pupils' progress remained



inadequate. There is evidence that since then pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science has started to improve. There are positive signs of progress in pupils using lively language and appreciating different formats of writing. Many of the older pupils use joined handwriting and generally punctuate correctly. In mathematics, they express solutions successfully aided by clear guidance and examples by the teachers when errors are made. In science, knowledge is gained by carrying out practical investigations. Some are able to predict possible outcomes but when questioned are less secure in the scientific reasons why.

The quality of teaching during the inspection and progress made by pupils in these lessons and overtime as seen in their books shows improvement. The level of challenge set for groups of pupils seen in teachers planning is well matched to the range of abilities. Well deployed teaching assistants ensure that tasks set for pupils, including those of a lower ability, are completed successfully and meet the lesson objectives. The pace of teaching often allows for brisk learning and this is having a positive effect on achievement across the key stages and particularly in Key Stage 2. Reliable school data, that systematically monitors pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy, shows improvement across each year group since September and indicates a majority of pupils making more rapid progress in the autumn term. However, the school are aware that there is some way to go to eradicate the stubborn legacy of underachievement.

The whole-school marking policy introduced at the beginning of the academic year is helping to improve the rate of pupils' learning and progress. Most pupils are aware of their targets and understand the steps they need to take to meet them. Marking is regular and informative offering clear direction on what to do to improve. Pupils appreciate this, one commenting that 'comments make us feel good about ourselves.' The policy of 'three stars and a wish' is well received and appreciated by all. This highly visual method of assessing work helps pupils understand which areas they need to revisit and improve upon. Time is set aside during the school day for pupils to do this. There is currently some inconsistency in the policy's application across classes. This is not helping the pupils and devalues its overall impact.

The headteacher is driving the improvements by providing reliable data that monitors and evaluates pupils' performance. She is ably assisted by three senior leaders, each one responsible for numeracy, literacy and pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties. Each feels empowered to take responsibility in their area and have worked together with the headteacher to identify those who are at risk of underachieving. Pupils are identified early through the close analysis of data and regular discussion with other teachers and adults. Appropriate strategies are used to improve attainment and achievement, such as splitting the current Year 6 class in two, allowing a better pupil to teacher ratio. The school is confident that achievement will improve in 2010 when compared to 2009. Inspection evidence supports this view because of the close monitoring of pupils' progress, better teaching and stronger gains in learning made by the pupils seen during the visit. Governors are beginning to take a more pro-active role in monitoring and evaluating



the school's work. They are well informed by the headteacher who does not shy away from delivering some difficult messages. There are informal arrangements in place to monitor the school's work and a recognition that these need to be more formalised and better focused to monitor more effectively the school's performance.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting requirements at this time. Training for child protection awareness is provided for all staff to the required level. In the case of the designated person their level of training is in excess of the requirements. Other policies are up to date and meet requirements and were seen to be used to good effect during the visit. The school recognises that all policies need to be formally ratified by governors and recorded as such in the governing body meeting minutes.

The school improvement plan includes the actions set out by the local authority and is reviewed regularly to monitor progress. Local authority consultants have provided support in identifying effective teaching and learning and other appropriate strategies to raise attainment.

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

Peter Cox
Additional Inspector