

18 June 2010

Mrs Christine Brown  
Headteacher  
Albany Village Primary School  
Crossgill  
Albany  
Washington  
Tyne and Wear  
NE37 1UA

Dear Mrs Brown

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 Thursday 17 June 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please thank the governors, the senior leadership team and the School Improvement Partner for meeting with me and pass on my thanks to the pupils that gave up part of their lunchtime to speak with me.

As a result of the inspection on 11 to 12 November 2009, the school was asked to:

- Raise achievement for all pupils in Years 1 to 6 by:
  - ensuring that pupils apply their skills to tackle practical problems
  - providing challenging activities and opportunities for pupils to investigate, explain and verify their methods and techniques.
- Improve teaching, learning and the quality of support provided in lessons by:
  - planning lessons with a clear focus on how pupils will learn and be supported
  - using assessment information to plan lessons and the next steps in pupils' learning
  - ensuring that all pupils participate fully in lessons and learn actively.
- Improve the quality and range of thought-provoking activities outdoors for Reception children so that they develop enquiring minds.

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

The headteacher is providing the school with strong and ambitious leadership. Her vision for the school is clearly articulated to staff, pupils, and parents and carers. A new senior leadership team has been created. It includes the deputy headteacher, core subject leaders and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader. New senior leaders have been provided with training to help them carry out their roles effectively. They have also worked alongside the headteacher and deputy headteacher carrying out joint monitoring activities and lesson observations to ensure that the school has an accurate view of its strengths and the areas that require further improvement. The skills of this new team are developing well and individual team members are beginning to lead aspects of the school's development independently.

The school evaluates information about its progress robustly and uses this information to plan further improvements. The deputy headteacher has implemented an effective system to track pupils' achievement and to identify the progress made by groups and individuals. As a result, the school is increasingly able to assess the impact of its actions on pupils' achievement and teachers can identify and correct any underachievement at an early stage. The governing body has an accurate view of the school's progress. Governors have effective systems to share the responsibility for monitoring the school's progress and ensuring that areas of weakness are tackled successfully. There are regular 'challenge meetings' with the headteacher and governors ask perceptive questions about the effectiveness of the school's actions and its plans for the future. The school's procedures to safeguard its pupils are robust.

Pupils' attainment remains low but the school's data indicate that the outcomes of national assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 are likely to improve this year. More pupils have made two levels of progress in both English and mathematics than did so in the past, but weaknesses in pupils' basic skills, particularly in their handwriting, spelling and punctuation, are inhibiting their attainment especially in writing. Pupils of all ages make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in most lessons because teachers use information about their attainment to plan learning. Teachers usually plan different tasks for pupils of different abilities but these tasks are not always well enough adapted to pupils' needs because teachers do not take sufficient account of information from day-to-day assessment and marking. Pupils say that in some lessons, particularly in mathematics, the work is too easy and evidence from lesson observations and the work scrutiny confirms this view. Pupils gain satisfaction from the successful completion of work but some do not progress at a brisk enough pace.

Pupils are given good opportunities to work with a partner or a group on collaborative tasks. They are learning to plan and organise their work and apply their skills to new situations. They enjoy this way of working and say that lessons are fun. The school's focus on practical and investigative activities ensures that all pupils participate fully in lessons. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their work and that of



their peers. They say that they enjoy doing this and they feel that it helps to improve their understanding.

Teaching is improving because the school is focusing on how and what pupils will learn. There is a new teaching and learning policy that makes clear the school's expectations. A new format for planning lessons has been introduced and teachers have been provided with very good professional training and development opportunities. There is a clear sense of purpose in the school and new approaches to teaching and learning have been adopted consistently by all staff. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly, although the quality of marking remains variable. In some lessons work is simply ticked while in others teachers' comments give pupils helpful guidance that tells them how to improve. The impact of the best marking is limited because pupils are not given enough time to act on the guidance provided. The school is beginning to adapt the curriculum to ensure that pupils have more opportunities to consolidate literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects and to make learning more interesting.

There is a new Early Years Foundation Stage leader and the curriculum in the Nursery and Reception classes has been improved. A new outdoor area will be built in the coming weeks and this has been designed to facilitate children's learning by giving them better opportunities for imaginative play. In the shorter term the school has improved the use of the outdoor area in Reception and it has ensured that it is used effectively and that it complements the provision made in the classroom. Adults support children well and this ensures that they enjoy learning.

The school is well supported by the local authority. The local authority's statement of action is helpful to the school and makes clear the support that will be provided. The School Improvement Partner has provided the school with very effective training that has increased the capacity of senior leaders and staff. The local authority monitors the school's progress rigorously. A recent review of the school by the local authority provides an accurate and robust evaluation of the school's progress thus far and helpful guidance to help it to improve 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

Christine Graham  
Her Majesty's Inspector