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Mrs C Slight
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Slight

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 December 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Thanks also to the pupils, staff and school improvement partner who gave up their time to talk to me.

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- Focus school leaders' monitoring of lessons on the progress that all pupils are making in their learning.
- Make more rigorous use of challenging whole-school targets to set clear, measurable success criteria in the school improvement plan so that governors and school leaders can readily gauge how well the school is doing.
- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

good progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Working closely with the school improvement partner you, the governors and your senior team have set out a clear direction for improving the school's performance. Staff, and pupils are clear that the approach taken is being successful and making Arunside a better school. For example, you have worked hard to improve the



learning environments since the last inspection and these are now welcoming and stimulating.

Standards in 2008 were below the national average in English, mathematics and science. This cohort made satisfactory progress in mathematics and science and good progress in English. Increased focus on the quality of learning in the classroom and improved tracking and intervention to support the progress of a generally stronger cohort led to a significant rise in standards in 2009. Standards were high and progress was good in science and mathematics and outstanding in English. Demanding targets were set for this year group and exceeded in English, mathematics and science. For those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities targets were exceeded in English and science and met in mathematics. Targets for the current Year 6 are equally challenging and school data demonstrate that this cohort is on track to meet them. However, targets for the current Year 5 have been set on a different basis and the school is aware that, should they be met, this year group will underachieve considering their starting points. As a result the school is intending to revisit these targets.

Pupils all have their own personal targets for improvement; the majority of pupils know them off by heart and those that do not, know where they are written. They are happy to report their satisfaction with the school and its teachers and how their targets help them improve their work and progress. Overall, pupils are doing well in the school, although in some year groups progress is satisfactory while in others it is outstanding. The school is aware of this variation and is tackling it through specialist reading recovery and the work of learning mentors. There is considerable variation in the ability of cohorts at Arunside and this means that standards will rise and fall over time despite the progress made by pupils.

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders have focused their observations of teachers on the quality of learning taking place in their classrooms through new observation pro-forma and better staff training. This has resulted in improving learning and progress in the classroom. Monitoring of the school's work by the leadership team is rigorous and frequent and also looks closely at the quality of written feedback that pupils receive. A new policy has clarified expectations and improved the regularity of marking of pupils' work. However, school leaders are aware that improving marking is still 'work in progress', because the quality remains variable in terms of its impact on learning. While some useful direction is offered through marking in literacy, much marking still focuses on congratulation without guiding pupils on how they might improve. Pupils are also unsure how or whether they are supposed to respond to some comments in their books especially when they are phrased as questions.

As a result of the inspection in 2008, the school rewrote its school improvement plan with measurable success criteria. At the same time a series of action plans with a year's tenure were developed to tackle the specific recommendations of the report and raise attendance. These have been successful in allocating time and resources



to address the recommendations. For example, attendance has improved from below to above the national average. The clarity of success criteria, together with initiatives such as the recent expectation that middle leaders will present their work to the governing body, has facilitated sharper monitoring. This has allowed senior leaders and governors to focus the school's work and improve outcomes for pupils.

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 Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

