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Mr C Burton
Headteacher
Castle Primary School
Mow Cop Road
Mow Cop
Stoke-on-Trent
ST7 4NE

Dear Mr Burton

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Castle Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority representative, members of staff and to the pupils who spoke with me.

Since the last inspection there have been significant staff and other changes for this small school. The headteacher returned in September after a period of absence. One senior teacher has left and the number of classes reduced from four to three. Pupils are taught in mixed age classes. Reception children are taught with Year 1 pupils, Year 2 and 3 are taught together and Years 4, 5 and 6 together.

As a result of the inspection on 13 July 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the last inspection, there are early signs of improvement in pupils' achievement. Teacher's assessments, observations in lessons and the analysis of pupils' work show that pupils are on track to attain average standards in English and mathematics. Pupils' progress continues to be variable over time but is satisfactory overall. Class teachers have adopted improved systems for assessing pupils' work and this has resulted in a better knowledge of pupils' attainment and the more precise identification of what pupils need to do to improve further. School data also confirm that more pupils are on track to attain the highest grade, though there are still not enough pupils reaching their potential in English and mathematics. Systems

to identify and target interventions for those pupils who require additional support with their learning have improved and there are higher expectations for their success. Teaching assistants have received additional training to deliver specific support programmes, for example, to target motor skills. The impact of this can be seen in pupils' writing, particularly boys. However, across the school, the skills of teaching assistants remain underdeveloped and an underused resource.

School leaders and staff now share common goals. Staff are working together more successfully as a team to implement improvement measures. Under the direction of the local authority, improved systems for staff communication and monitoring and evaluation have been implemented. Consequently, staff and the governing body are more able to contribute to whole-school development planning and self-evaluation. For example, most staff have had the opportunity to carry out lesson observations, work sampling and moderation activities. As a result, they have produced action plans for their areas of responsibility, though it is too early to see the impact of much of this work. A monitoring timetable has been put in place. This involves the governing body, which is now able to look more closely at the school's work, ask challenging questions and help set the strategic direction of the school. There is still work to be done to ensure, for example, that the information given to the governing body and to parents, is accurate and evaluative and provides them with clear information about the quality of provision in school and the impact it is having on how well all pupils are doing. A good deal of information is collected and is now used effectively in pupil progress interviews to hold teachers to account. However, this information is not analysed and presented clearly enough at the strategic level to give an accurate and clear picture of the success of the school's work overall.

The school has put policies and procedures in place to ensure that statutory responsibilities to promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination and to promote community cohesion are met. The school collects pertinent information about its pupils and the community it serves. It is analysing this information and putting plans in place to improve provision, but it is too early to evaluate this work.

Curriculum plans have been modified suitably in order to reflect the current organisation of pupils. The plans ensure topic themes are not repeated and include the progression of knowledge and skills across year groups. The reorganisation of classrooms has ensured that those children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and, where appropriate, in Year 1, are able to have daily and free access to an outdoor area. Though currently laid to tarmac, the area has been improved with the addition of a canopy, planting troughs and other resources. Whilst children now play happily outdoors every day, the planning for this aspect of provision does not ensure meaningful learning opportunities.

The local authority statement of action and action plan has been evaluated and found to meet requirements. Support from the authority began in April 2010, prior to the inspection, and is well focused and of high quality. It is this support which has largely driven the satisfactory improvements made since the inspection. The

direction provided by the Education Improvement Partner, literacy and Early Years Foundation Stage consultants is particularly valued by staff, who talk enthusiastically about its positive influence on the quality of teaching and leadership.

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

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2010

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders and staff share common goals and work towards these as a united team
 - all staff and governors contribute to whole-school development planning and self-evaluation
 - assessment information is used effectively to evaluate the impact of provision on the outcomes for all groups of pupils
 - statutory duties are met in relation to equality of opportunity and the promotion of community cohesion.
- To accelerate pupils' progress and raise standards further, improve the provision by:
 - developing curriculum planning so that it reflects the organisation of pupils into the class groupings planned for September
 - making more effective use of assessment information to ensure that all pupils are given challenging tasks in lessons and can be as independent in their learning as possible
 - implementing plans to improve the outdoor area for the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are suitably trained so that they can support pupils' learning by leading small groups.