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13 May 2011

Mrs L Willis
Headteacher
Stoke Minster CofE Aided Primary School
Boothan Old Road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 4EE

Dear Mrs Willis

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Stoke Minster CofE Aided Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff and the School Improvement Partner who gave up time to talk to me.

One of the Key Stage 1 classes has had a change of teacher since the last inspection. There have been no other significant changes.

As a result of the inspection on 24 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Analysis of the school's data, evidence from lessons observed and from pupils' work indicates that pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection. In 2010, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 was close to the national average, with a substantial improvement in mathematics. These improved standards of attainment have been consolidated and the attainment of pupils who are currently in Year 6 is broadly average. Wide differences in the ability of different year groups causes attainment to vary across the school but assessment data verify that a very large majority of pupils are making the expected or better progress in their learning.

Extensive development of the science curriculum has led to a substantial increase in the amount of practical investigations pupils carry out. Pupils have welcomed the change and enthuse about science lessons in which they formulate questions, test ideas for themselves and find the solutions to problems. Their knowledge and understanding are more secure and this is reflected in much-improved attainment and progress, particularly in the skills of scientific enquiry. Teachers' ability to match work in science lessons to the needs of different

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groups of pupils has improved, although it is still rather variable and some teachers show a better understanding of how to challenge higher attaining pupils than others.

While some of the teaching remains satisfactory, an increased proportion is good. In the majority of the lessons observed pupils were asked stimulating questions and challenged to make decisions and work out answers for themselves. Older pupils recognise the changes teachers have made and feel that these are helping them to learn better. Many teachers are now using assessment productively when planning lessons, modifying activities so that pupils of different abilities have work that is appropriate to their learning needs. As a result, pupils are building knowledge, understanding and skills at an improving rate. In lessons that are satisfactory rather than good, the pace is often a little slow and the purpose of a task is not always made clear enough to the pupils. Effective strategies, such as pupils working cooperatively in pairs or in small groups, have become a regular feature of many lessons. This has increased opportunities for pupils to learn from each other and to work together to formulate ideas and solve problems, something they told the inspector they much enjoy.

Improvements made in the Early Years Foundation Stage have increased children's attainment and the proportion on track to achieve the targets for their age by the end of Reception is higher than in previous years. Improvements to the way pupils' achievements are evaluated have enabled staff to identify children who require additional help quickly and to plan strategically to meet their needs. The outcomes of this support and of provision in general have been more-regularly evaluated, with a wider range of staff involved. Visits to other Early Years Foundation Stage settings followed by whole-staff discussion meetings have increased teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge and provided good opportunities for the sharing of ideas. Resources and facilities out of doors have improved considerably and, while development is not fully complete, all three of the Early Years Foundation Stage classes have much better and far more regular access to the outdoor environment. The planning of outdoor activities has become more detailed and better balanced between those that are adult led and others that pupils choose for themselves. Sounds and letters are taught regularly, usually at the start of the day, but on occasions the mistakes pupils make are not corrected thoroughly enough.

Despite recent improvements there is no complacency and, under the purposeful and enthusiastic leadership of the headteacher, the desire to continue to improve is strong. Self-evaluation procedures have continued to develop, highlighting areas for improvement and enabling appropriate actions to be taken. Increasing the quality of teaching and learning continues to be a priority for the school. The video recording of lessons to inform discussions between class teachers and members of the senior leadership team has quickly become established as an integral part of the school's teaching and learning strategy. Opportunities for meaningful dialogue have raised staff awareness of the impact of teaching on pupils' achievements and helped to improve the quality of their lessons. Since the last inspection, much of the support provided by the local authority has focused on the teaching of writing. This has helped teachers to develop their expertise and skills which is having a positive effect on pupils' learning and progress.

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

Mr Keith Bardon
Additional inspector

Annex

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

- Increase pupils' progress in science by:
 - developing pupils' independent work so they develop practical skills
 - ensuring that teachers' planning meets the needs of different groups of pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - raising the challenge in lessons
 - using assessment more effectively in lesson planning to identify what pupils already understand in order to move their learning forward quickly
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to work together.
- Raise attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage across all areas of learning, particularly in mathematics by:
 - undertaking a more rigorous analysis of how well children are achieving
 - ensuring that there is systematic evaluation of the provision and how it affects learning to plan ongoing improvement
 - improving the use of the outdoor area to promote high-quality learning.