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17 June 2011

Mr Michael Allen  
Headteacher  
Stalbridge CE Primary School  
Stalbridge  
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Dorset  
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Dear Mr Allen

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Stalbridge CE Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 16 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please would you thank the staff and the pupils for the help they gave to me during the day.

As a result of the inspection on 19 and 20 January 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 has made:

good progress in making improvements.

*and*

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

At the time of the previous inspection, test results at Key Stage 2 had declined over the preceding three years. There were, however, clear signs that this decline had been arrested. This promise was fulfilled in the summer of 2010 when Year 6 pupils took their tests. This group of pupils made much better progress during their time in Key Stage 2 than previous cohorts. Consequently, their test results climbed to above national average overall. Boys did particularly well in English.



School assessment data and evidence collected during this monitoring inspection indicate that the Year 6 pupils leaving the school this year are on course to exceed the results attained by last year's Year 6 pupils.

Assessments for Year 2 pupils in summer 2010 were well above the national average overall. Writing results for girls were exceptionally strong. Unvalidated assessments for current Year 2 pupils show that they have attained standards that are broadly in line with the national average in reading, above in writing but slightly below in mathematics.

The improved standards that pupils are achieving by the time they leave Stalbridge CE are underpinned by good quality teaching. This quality has been maintained since the previous inspection and there is some evidence to suggest its consistency has been improved.

Teaching observed during this inspection was typically strong and making a good impact on pupils' learning and progress. Teachers give crisp explanations, clear instructions, and have developed effective classroom routines so little learning time is wasted. Resources, including interactive whiteboards, are used effectively to interest and enthuse pupils. Teachers give pupils time to think, and support them in developing and using a wider vocabulary in speech and writing. Teaching assistants' support is well managed. They do not work exclusively with pupils with special educational needs and / or disabilities but are deployed flexibly during lessons, enabling teachers to ensure that pupils of varying abilities are effectively included. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use skilfully in their planning. Behaviour contributes well to learning. A clearly understood behaviour policy which details rewards and sanctions is in place across the school.

New techniques to assess pupils' learning and progress and support their learning had been introduced at the time of the previous inspection. These are now well embedded. Teachers use questioning skilfully to probe and extend pupils' understanding although, at times, teachers miss opportunities to target individual pupils to answer questions, thus ensuring they are engaged with learning. Marking across the school is now good and, in some classrooms, it is outstanding, clearly assessing what pupils have done well and understood, and giving next steps for learning. Pupils enjoy responding in writing to this marking, although younger children would sometimes benefit from adult support to benefit fully from the comments their teachers have written. Pupils have curricular targets so they and their parents understand the steps they need to take in English and mathematics to improve their work. Currently, however, the school does not as a matter of course inform parents of the National Curriculum level and sub-level at which their children are working in reading, writing and mathematics.

The curriculum is well considered and effectively geared to build children's key skills and knowledge. In each classroom there are good opportunities for writing, devised with insightful consideration of pupils' interests. The evening before this monitoring



inspection, Year 6 pupils researched Indian Runner ducks for homework. On the day of the inspection, they handled the ducks which live and breed in the school's wildlife area. Pupils took notes as an outside speaker gave a brief talk about the ducks. The pupils then discussed their findings and wrote a report text. In this instance, the impact of an interesting and relevant curriculum combined with expert teaching was starkly apparent. All pupils, but particularly boys, were inspired to produce the best report of which they were capable.

In Key Stage 1, the teaching of early reading and writing, including systematic phonics, is well emphasised, but the assessment of individual pupils' phonic skills is not yet sufficiently diagnostic to ensure that pupils make optimum progress. Throughout the school, a number of pupils, usually boys, have poor pencil grip.

The school has focused effectively on meeting the social and emotional needs of vulnerable pupils, but is not yet measuring the impact of this work on these pupils' academic progress.

At the time of the previous inspection, there was no permanent subject leader for English. Since then, a leader for learning in literacy has been appointed from within the existing staff. She is developing a secure understanding of the profile of the quality of teaching and learning through regular work scrutiny and has begun to directly observe literacy lessons. She has introduced innovative reading journals which are contributing to raising the profile of reading and writing with parents and pupils.

Subject leaders met by HMI during this inspection have a fuller understanding of their role in driving forward improvement than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. The headteacher has judiciously encouraged senior leaders and subject leaders to pursue useful and sometimes accredited leadership courses, and the focus of leaders on improvement has sharpened as a result. Currently, subject leaders' role in accounting to governors for the progress and attainment of different groups and cohorts of pupils across the school is underdeveloped.

The school improvement plan is a sound working document and clearly guides the work of senior leaders. Success criteria and monitoring and evaluation functions within the plan are, at present, ill defined and hamper the use of the plan as a tool to measure as well as to promote improvement.

A significant and very positive feature is the focus of performance management arrangements on pupils' progress. Staff are sharply cognisant of their targets; one teaching assistant with whom HMI spoke during a lesson referred to her targets to support individual pupils.

At the time of this monitoring inspection, secure arrangements were in place for checking the suitability of staff to work with children. In January 2010, a very small minority of parent questionnaires commented on a safety issue regarding gates into



the playground and doors that were not always locked during school hours. These matters were brought to the attention of the governing body who continue to act sensibly and proportionately in their work to ensure that the school is welcoming, accessible and safe. One parent, who commented that she had felt that communication by senior leaders was not good eighteen months ago, noted that she was very happy with the way in which senior leaders now communicated with her and resolved the issues she had raised quickly and efficiently.

Thank you again for your help and time during this monitoring inspection. I hope that you have found it helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010**

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
  - ensuring the full and consistent use of the new strategies that have been introduced in teaching and the curriculum.
- Empower and improve the skills of subject leaders so that they are able to take more responsibility for subject development by:
  - appointing a permanent leader for literacy
  - ensuring leaders receive appropriate professional development
  - allocating time for monitoring areas of responsibility.