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Mrs Katharine Hall
Headteacher
Marshside Primary School
Elswick Road
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Southport
Merseyside
PR9 9XA

Dear Mrs Hall

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Marshside Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 October 2012, and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority officer, staff and pupils who gave up their time to talk to me about the school.

Since the previous inspection there have been some changes in the staffing structure. The Year 6 teacher and a teaching assistant have left the school. The Year 4 teacher has been moved to Year 6 and a newly qualified teacher has joined the staff team. There has been a restructuring of teaching responsibilities and the deployment of teaching assistants. The vacancies on the governing body are now filled with the recruitment of three parent governors; a new staff governor has been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 31 January 2012, 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.

Staff and members of the governing body are committed to raising achievement and lifting attainment in English and mathematics for the pupils at Marshside. They have used a 'raising achievement' plan to steer the school forward and there is a focus on improving progress across the school. There is evidence to show that this action is having some effect, although there remains a variable picture of performance. Unvalidated results show that, for the Year 6 pupils who left the school in 2012, attainment was better than for the Year 6 pupils in 2011. Although the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 4 in English dipped slightly, the proportion gaining the higher Level 5 increased due to pupils making better progress in writing. In mathematics the percentages of pupils reaching Level 4 and Level 5, increased significantly to above average. Teacher assessments for pupils at the end

January 2012



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of Year 2 in 2012 showed some improvement in reading and writing at the expected level but a slight decline in mathematics. Progress for current pupils is showing signs of recovery with more pupils at the expected level for their age than at the time of the inspection. Senior leaders have focused on raising attainment to the expected level and now recognise that the focus needs to shift to raising attainment higher.

Five lessons and one part lesson were observed during the monitoring visit which confirmed that the quality of teaching is improving. Senior leaders set high standards of practice for all members of staff so that teachers and teaching assistants know what is expected from them. Monitoring activities conducted by the headteacher and local authority intervention officers identified aspects of teachers' practice which needed developing. Staff have engaged positively with this support, for example, the whole-school training in assessing pupils' work has enabled a more consistent approach to be adopted by teachers and teaching assistants. Guidance in planning lessons has resulted in teachers planning activities which match the needs of the pupils better. Through the effective approach of checking pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics half termly, staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and can more readily identify those pupils who may benefit from support programmes to maintain progress. For example, in a mathematics lesson all groups of pupils were challenged at the correct level for their ability.

Staff have engaged in professional training from local authority officers so that they have an enhanced understanding of the links between reading and writing. They have worked with other schools to observe good practice and compare pupils' work against similar aged pupils in other schools. Pupils have a literacy skills book and an extended writing book. Each week pupils write an extended piece which may relate to topic work. As a result, pupils are using more interesting vocabulary to express their ideas. Pupils have more chances to use their mathematical skills in problem-solving activities. A mathematics challenge is set either at the start of a module of work, so pupils can identify what they need to learn, or at the end of a module, to consolidate learning. Staff identify gaps in pupils' learning which are revisited. A daily taught session on handwriting skills, the 'hand writer of the week' competition and teachers' good modelling of handwriting have raised standards in this aspect; pupils take more pride in their work and try hard to write clearly in all subjects.

Teachers provide pupils with appropriate feedback through regular marking which affirms pupils' efforts. In the best examples, pupils are given clear advice about how to improve their work which relates to the learning objective. Older pupils have targets for English and mathematics, but they are not always clear about how to improve their work. There is an opportunity for the school to review the link between assessment, marking and target-setting so pupils know exactly what to do to improve their work. There were examples of teachers encouraging pupils to use 'talking partners' and 'peer assessment' strategies to check their own progress and that of their classmates. These improvements in developing the quality of teaching are having a positive impact on pupils' learning; however, senior leaders recognise the need to ensure consistency in all aspects of practice throughout the school.

The school has reorganised the teaching of letters and sounds so that activities are more securely matched to the pupils' individual needs. Pupils in Years 1, 2, and 3 are grouped according to skill level and teachers and teaching assistants plan interesting and engaging activities. High expectations and regular checks on pupils' progress ensure pupils are placed in the most appropriate group.

The local authority's statement of action did not meet requirements initially. However, amendments have been made and it now meets requirements. The school engaged well with the effective support provided by local authority intervention officers. A coaching approach supported the development of middle leader roles; well-planned training has contributed to improved classroom practice; and support has been given to the leadership team in bringing about the necessary improvements.

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

Mrs Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Raise achievement to at least satisfactory or better and lift standards in English and mathematics to be above average by:
 - establishing high expectations for the achievement of all groups of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2, and in particular, planning work for the more able
 - in Key Stage 1, pitching the teaching of letters and sounds at an appropriate level of challenge for pupils' different levels of attainment
 - developing handwriting skills and providing more opportunities to use them across the curriculum in both key stages
 - in Key Stage 2, developing pupils' writing so that it provides more interest for the reader, for instance in the quality of the vocabulary used
 - in mathematics, extending the opportunities for pupils in both key stages to apply their mathematical skills
 - developing marking and target-setting across both key stages so that pupils have a better understanding of how they are doing and what they need to do next.