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Samantha Warner  
Headteacher  
Sticklepath Community School  
Woodville Estate  
Barnstaple  
EX31 2HH

Dear Miss Warner

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Sticklepath Community School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 November 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to everyone who gave up their time to meet with me.

Since the previous inspection there have been some changes taking place within the school. There have been seven new appointments to the teaching staff. The governing body has been reorganised, with the curriculum committee taking particular responsibility for monitoring progress with the school's plans for improvement.

As a result of the inspection on 20–21 March 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 pupils' achievement.

The results of the 2012 national tests, combined with teacher assessments indicate that standards by the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 have risen from levels that were significantly well below average. By the end of Year 6, pupils were reaching levels in their reading ability that were similar to those seen nationally, although results in writing and mathematics remained below average. Most pupils achieved well over time, especially those who entered Year 3 with average standards, who made accelerated progress. However, less able pupils made slower progress and fewer girls reached the higher levels in their national tests. In Years 3 to 5, pupils' achievement increased due to improvements in teaching, but not uniformly so across classes and subject areas. Whilst pupils' achievement is good in reading and

improving quickly in writing, consistently quicker progress is not yet the norm in mathematics. Whilst overall, standards are rising, there remain pockets of under-achievement for some groups of boys; girls and those supported under the pupil premium funding, whose levels of ability remain well below that expected for their age. This year, improvements have been made to the mathematics curriculum so pupils get increased opportunities to apply numeracy skills to their project work studies. Particular emphasis is now placed on helping pupils understand key ideas about number and on the development of their calculation skills. Pupils identified as needing particular support with their basic skills, benefit from small group work, often within class or in adjacent spaces within the school. This is proving effective in helping them gain lost ground in their learning.

Checks on the quality of teaching by the senior leaders and governing body, are more rigorous, leading to an increase in well-taught lessons. In lessons, pupils are clear about what they are learning and find the activities set for them engaging. Teachers regularly keep a check on pupils' learning during lessons and use this information to plan work for them that is better matched to their particular needs. Questions are used well by teachers to encourage pupils to explain their ideas during whole-class discussions. When teaching small groups of pupils, teachers target specific pupils to help them apply particular basic skills in interesting ways. In one session for example, younger pupils confidently used their knowledge of letters and sounds to identify unfamiliar words as they retold the story of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. Where the quality of teaching dips, lesson introductions are too directed by the teacher, with fewer opportunities for all pupils to discuss their ideas. Upon occasion, in mathematics lessons, teachers do not clearly demonstrate to pupils how to work out problems and record their work. This impedes their understanding.

Teachers mark pupils' mathematics work regularly. Careful checks of their progress are used to set targets with pupils that establish what they need to learn over time. The day-to-day marking of pupils' books by teachers, does not always identify next steps in their learning; where advice is given, checks are not always made to ensure pupils have acted upon the advice. In some lessons, teachers give pupils choice about when to move on to more difficult work and this helps them challenge themselves to learn more quickly. This approach has not been in place long enough nor has it been implemented consistently enough to have a full impact on all pupils' learning.

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has been resolute in setting higher expectations and driving faster improvement. A new leadership team is in place; subject and team leaders are now fully involved in checks on the school's performance. Senior leaders have ambitious targets for improving the school. Systems for gauging and recording how well pupils learn are effective. The information is used well to hold teachers to account for helping pupils make progress and for making decisions about which pupils require additional teaching support. Senior staff check on the quality of teaching regularly; individual staff are set clear targets for improving their practice and are supporting each other well as they

develop new initiatives. The school recognises the need to check carefully that its work to improve teaching in mathematics is helping raise achievement for all groups of pupils.

The governing body now plays a fuller role in assessing and checking on the school's improvement work through regular visits, reviewing reports and hearing presentations from staff. It holds senior leaders to account well by appropriately-timed challenges and supportive action. The local authority's statement of action fulfils requirements. Its officers and advisers have provided effective support for senior leaders in establishing rigorous action planning and in evaluating progress with these plans. Support for subject leaders and advisory support for teachers introducing new classroom initiatives has been effective. There are suitable plans in place for much of this external support to be phased out in the near future.

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

David Townsend

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012**

- Accelerate pupils' progress overall, and especially in Years 3 and 4, and raise their attainment in mathematics to at least average levels, by:
  - building effectively on previous learning to make sure that pupils' number skills, particularly their understanding of place value, are developed in a systematic way
  - ensuring the mathematics curriculum provides a clear framework for the acquisition and development of skills including through other subjects.
  
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by March 2013, by ensuring that:
  - assessment information is used to match tasks and activities to pupils' different abilities and needs so they are fully challenged and learning proceeds at a good pace
  - teachers' marking, especially in mathematics, consistently identifies pupils' next steps in learning so that they know what to do to improve.
  
- Ensure that leaders monitor carefully the impact of initiatives to raise pupils' achievement, particularly in mathematics, to sustain the drive to bring about further improvements.