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12 May 2007

Mrs K Takashima
Headteacher
Neston Primary School
Burton Road
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Cheshire
CH64 9RE

Dear Mrs Takashima

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you, your chair of governors, representatives of the local authority (LA) and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday, 10 May 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in September 2006, the school was asked to: raise standards in reading at Key Stage 1 and in writing throughout the school; ensure that children in Years 3 and 4 are sufficiently challenged to improve their rate of progress; develop the roles and responsibilities of some subject leaders to enable them to take a greater part in school improvement; and iron out inconsistencies in teaching, thereby raising the satisfactory teaching to good.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievements.

There have been significant changes to senior staff since the inspection. A permanent headteacher was appointed in January 2007 and an experienced deputy headteacher was seconded to the school in March. Although staffing issues are not completely resolved, the increased stability has helped the school to implement its actions with greater consistency.

Reading is developing successfully in Key Stage 1. The school has joined a pilot project, through the LA, to teach young children about the sounds of letters and letter combinations in a more systematic and structured way. Rigorous monitoring of

children's progress indicates that they are fully on track to meet their targets for the project. The classes have been rearranged, with Year 1 pupils taught alongside Reception children in two similar-aged classes. This is helping teachers meet the learning needs of children more closely. The lower attaining children in Year 1 and the higher attaining children in Reception benefit particularly from the broader range of opportunities in the mixed-age classes. The teaching of reading in small groups, led by the teacher, is of particularly good quality and children respond well, showing high levels of interest and a good understanding of what they are reading.

Children's writing is developing well. There is a high degree of consistency in the way writing is taught from one class to the next. All the teaching of writing observed was of good quality. The group and class writing workshop sessions led by teachers were particularly effective. Children show enthusiasm for writing: their responses to teachers' questions are quickly given and imaginative for their respective ages. Children's work in exercise books shows reasonable progression in the mastery of writing skills from year to year and clear attempts by children to improve systematically on their first attempts. The improvement of writing is a long-standing focus of the support given to the school by the LA's consultants and, more recently, by the seconded deputy headteacher. The school's tracking data shows that the support is now making a positive difference to writing standards.

The school has ironed out the inconsistencies in teaching to a substantial degree. All the teaching observed showed consistent use of effective strategies for teaching and learning. In particular, in each class, children knew exactly what they were expected to learn and had a very clear idea of their targets. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 and 4, the part of the school highlighted as needing significant improvement in the inspection report, was good and in line with that in most other classes. In all the classes observed lessons were conducted at a good pace, the classrooms were full of interesting work in progress and teachers had high expectations of their pupils. The assessment of learning was generally good, with some excellent examples, including pieces of writing that had been judged against National Curriculum levels.

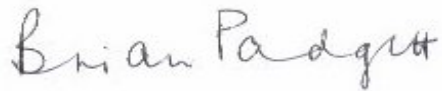
In developing the roles and responsibilities of teachers as subject leaders, the new headteacher has exercised good judgement in determining her priorities. Her audit of what was required to raise standards in reading and writing suggested that teachers needed first to assess children's progress more frequently and make better use of their assessments in planning lessons. These steps have been made. The roles of the subject leaders in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are most developed. However, significant development for all subject leaders has taken place. Each prepares an audit for their subject, followed by an action plan for improvement.

Much of the credit for the improvements and progress is due to the new headteacher and, more recently, to the seconded deputy headteacher. They are providing clear leadership for staff, with good communications and support, the latter based on good contemporary practice from the LA's consultants. The morale of staff is good. A particularly important development is teachers' acceptance that they are accountable

for the progress children make in their classes and of the function of management to monitor progress and to challenge underachievement. The chair of governors has played a key role in securing changes in staff to enable the school to move forward and the LA's support has been effective, latterly, in disseminating good practice and injecting urgency in the need for the school to provide evidence of improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Padgett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector