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Mrs S Buts
The Headteacher
The Beacon Infant and Nursery School
38 Robartes Road
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Dear Mrs Buts

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Jonathan Palk HMI and I inspected your school on 10 October 2007, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. I am particularly grateful to the deputy headteacher, members of the senior management team, the vice-chair of governors and your local authority (LA) inspector for the discussions we had with them. Please pass on my thanks to them and to the rest of the staff and the pupils.

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 on 24 and 25 January 2007 the school was asked to address the following areas for improvement.

- Improve standards in literacy and numeracy by raising teachers' expectations and ensuring that work is accurately matched to the needs of all pupils so that they make good progress.
- Use assessment data rigorously to track pupils' progress, plan lessons and set challenging but realistic targets for learning.
- Improve the skills of the senior leadership team in the monitoring of teaching and learning and assessing the effectiveness of their actions on raising standards.

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 governors recognise that the judgements of the January 2007 inspection have enabled them to take stock and move forward to the next stage of

development. The headteacher has used the inspection to focus on improved standards and gives clear leadership to her staff. She knows the school and the community it serves well and is accurate in her judgements of the considerable needs of the pupils and their families. All staff share the drive to improve the standards achieved by pupils. Governors provide clear support to the school in its endeavour to raise achievement.

The standard of teaching has improved since the inspection. This has been achieved through focused work on improvement using an independent consultant, the LA support services, and monitoring by the senior management team with a focus on literacy and numeracy. Expectations for work and behaviour are generally appropriate and the matching of tasks to the needs of pupils is reinforced through clear learning objectives. Teaching assistants contribute well to lessons, reinforcing and developing learning objectives to individuals and groups. Classrooms and general areas are attractive and lively learning environments. The work on teaching and learning has had an impact on achievement with the 2007 statutory assessment results showing a significant improvement on the previous year in the standards achieved in reading, writing and mathematics, although these are still below national and county averages. Focused work on writing for more able pupils achieved good results at the higher level which were above national and county averages. However, some inconsistencies remain, in otherwise satisfactory teaching, when the pace of a lesson can be slowed by spending too long explaining the instructions before pupils begin an activity. Sometimes behaviour management could be more effective in ensuring pupils keep on task. Also, some of the questioning used in teaching could be more challenging to extend the vocabulary and thinking of pupils.

The school has an assessment tracking system in place which is understood by all staff, although there has been a delay in transferring this to an assessment management package. There has been effective work in identifying groups of pupils who are in danger of underachieving and teachers are aware that, in order to raise standards, targeted groups need carefully structured teaching. The school has set appropriately challenging targets on the basis of assessment data, but what is less clear is the structure of the support required for potentially underachieving groups to meet these targets. Marking, although improved, is still inconsistent in providing pupils with clear indications of what they need to do to make the next step in their learning.

Since the inspection the senior management team has worked hard to develop a system for monitoring teaching and learning. With support and visits to other schools, this has been effective in raising professional discussion and implementing improved teaching. This has raised the confidence of the management team and enabled the members to use secure judgements to concentrate on raising standards and achievement. They have a clear determination to improve teaching from satisfactory to good before the next inspection, but to accomplish this it will be necessary to ensure recommendations from observations are followed through. In order to build on these positive developments, the team now need to review progress made and define clearly the next steps to be taken to raise achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. Governors have played a clear role in the

implementation of the action plan following the inspection and are now more active in monitoring the work of the school.

The LA is providing good support to the school. Its statement of action is clear, recognises the existing strengths of the school, and outlines appropriate strategies for areas which require development. It has ensured an effective balance between challenge and support by working in partnership with teachers and monitoring the impact of action taken. The LA has confidence in the headteacher and staff to take the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector