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5 October 2007

Mrs Robina Crowe
Headteacher
Smithdown Primary School
Chatsworth Drive
Liverpool
Merseyside
L7 6LJ

Dear Mrs Crowe

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils who talked to me.

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 February 2007, the school was asked to:

- Raise achievement, especially that of girls in Years 3 to 6 and the more able, so that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress
- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good enough to overcome the barriers to learning experienced by a significant minority of pupils
- Help pupils to understand better the links between different areas of their learning and to use their basic skills more frequently in all subjects
- Deploy learning assistants more effectively to support pupils, especially the vulnerable, throughout the whole lesson

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.

Results in the end-of-Key Stage 2 national tests taken in the term following the inspection showed improvements in mathematics and science, although standards in writing remained low as did standards overall at the end of Key Stage 1. The school carefully analyses data on pupils' performance. This indicates that pupils overall make satisfactory progress. Some groups of pupils make good progress, for instance those in the Foundation Stage and those learning English as an additional language. However, whilst slight improvement has been made in raising the achievement of the

more able pupils, this still remains an area for concern. Girls achieve at the same rate as boys of similar abilities. The school recognises that because of pupils' low levels of skills when they start in the Nursery, they need to make consistently good progress in order to reach nationally expected levels by the time they leave school. As a result, challenging individual targets have been set for pupils in Key Stage 2. The school also recognises that in order to raise standards at Key Stage 1 from their present low level, similarly challenging targets need to be set. This is now a priority for action. The good quality of the school's analysis of performance data and the use of this to set challenging targets are emerging as strong features in the drive for improvement. Pupils report that they are set detailed and challenging targets in their work. Overall, the school is making satisfactory progress in raising achievement and in addressing the long-term issue of low standards.

Decisive action by the school's leadership and the governing body, together with strong and effective support from the local authority (LA), is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. This in turn is beginning to improve pupils' achievement. The school is making satisfactory progress in relation to this issue for improvement but recognises that there is still some way to go. The school's leaders have worked closely with the LA's consultants to develop effective skills of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. This has enabled the school's leaders to identify good practice, as well as shortcomings in teaching, and to plan the steps necessary to spread good practice and eliminate the weaknesses. Where teaching is most effective, pupils are actively involved as learners, undertaking challenging work that ensures they achieve well. There is now a strong core of such teaching. However, a minority of weaker teaching remains that does not sufficiently stimulate pupils to learn. The school has identified this and is taking robust steps to bring about improvements.

The school has made satisfactory progress in addressing the need to improve its curriculum. Thorough evaluation of curriculum provision, as part of the school's self-review, has led to a revised curriculum plan that is focused upon developing pupils' skills and knowledge through interesting and exciting themes for learning. Staff have undertaken training and are embracing the new approach, although teachers' planning for such themes does not consistently identify the opportunities for pupils to develop important skills of literacy and numeracy. It is too soon to judge the impact of this work on pupils' achievement but pupils themselves say that their lessons are interesting.

Learning assistants are making a good contribution to pupils' learning in the majority of lessons but not yet in all. Where best practice is developing, learning assistants work effectively with small groups of pupils, guided by lesson planning to which they have contributed. The school has recognised the need for learning assistants to work closely with teachers in the planning of lessons and has provided the opportunity for this to happen on a weekly basis. This initiative is bearing fruit although, in a minority of lessons, learning assistants are not always actively involved in supporting pupils' learning, especially when the whole class is working together. Overall, however, the school is making good progress in addressing this issue.

The LA is working closely and effectively with the school in order to secure improvements. A strong spirit of partnership is evident.

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

Yours sincerely

Frank Ravey
Additional Inspector