

30 November 2007

Mr S Hughes  
Headteacher  
Castleway Primary School  
Castleway North  
Morton  
Merseyside  
CH46 1RN

Dear Mr Hughes

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CASTLEWAY  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Phil Snelling, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Traves  
Additional Inspector

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 28 and 29 November 2007

### Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons in each class. Discussions were held with key staff and pupils. Discussions also took place with the vice chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA). A range of documents and pupils' work was examined and pupils' conduct around the school was observed.

### Context

There have been some additions to the support staff since the last visit. The school has used a grant from the LA to employ three teaching assistants and a part-time teacher to provide support to pupils across the school and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly at Key Stage 2.

### Achievement and standards

The school's provisional 2007 results in the national tests for Key Stage 2 show an improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels in mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher level in science also rose. Improvement in mathematics at the expected level was marked when compared with the results in 2006. Overall standards in English dipped, because too few pupils attained both the expected and higher levels in writing. However, reading results showed some improvement and were close to average at both the expected and higher levels. Despite these improvements, standards remain too low, as a result of past underachievement. However, school data indicates that this group of pupils made up some of the lost ground last year, owing to better teaching and targeted support. Those pupils with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, made slightly better progress than their classmates, as did the small proportion of more able pupils and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2007 indicate that pupils' overall performance was similar to that of 2006. The dip from 2005 was not reversed and standards were well below average. However, mathematics results improved significantly, with a higher proportion of pupils reaching both the expected and higher levels. Writing was the weakest area, with results falling sharply and no pupils achieving the higher level. School data indicates that many of these pupils did well in relation to their starting points, particularly in reading, despite failing to reach the expected level. Children continue to get a good start in the Foundation Stage, although by the end of Reception their skills are still some way below those expected for their age, because they have had a lot of ground to make up.

The school has continued to improve its systems for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets for them, particularly in writing. Pupils understand their targets and are becoming more involved in checking on their own progress. They say that this is helping them to understand how to improve. Staff are making more effective use of robust assessment information to accelerate pupils' progress in lessons. Assessment data and pupils' work indicate that more pupils are progressing at a faster rate than previously. This is starting to mitigate the effects of past underachievement. However, there is still more to be done across the school to further refine the targets set for those pupils of lower ability, who are not identified as having particular learning needs. The recently implemented grouping arrangements for mathematics and English in Years 5 and 6 are working particularly well, resulting in very good progress for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, the increased help provided for pupils in Year 3 is effectively supporting them in making the transition between Key Stages 1 and 2. The school has introduced a range of initiatives to tackle underachievement in writing, including 'The Big Write' project. This is in its early stages of development, but has already started to have an impact on pupils' enjoyment and enthusiasm. Consequently, progress in writing is starting to accelerate across the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 – satisfactory.

#### Personal development and well-being

The strengths seen previously in this area have been sustained. Attendance has improved and figures are now close to the national average. A calm and purposeful atmosphere pervades classrooms. Pupils' behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. They are open, friendly and enjoy talking about their work. They recognise that they are making better progress as a result of being challenged more appropriately in lessons. They are encouraged by the stronger emphasis placed by staff on rewards. This improvement in teaching and learning has reduced to rare occasions the times when pupils become restless because they are bored. For them, lessons are now more fun and they are enjoying learning. New and improved approaches to teaching the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are helping to ensure that pupils are better prepared for the future.

#### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved; there was more good teaching seen than at the last visit. Additional staff have recently been appointed. This has allowed for more small groups of pupils with particular learning needs to receive close, well targeted support. As a result, these pupils are making better progress and visibly enjoy learning. The thoroughness of lesson planning has been sustained. Plans set out very clearly what pupils are to learn and how teaching assistants should support them in their activities. Challenge to all pupils has further improved as

teachers use their knowledge of pupils' progress more effectively to pitch work at the right level. Most teachers use questions skilfully to probe pupils' understanding and push their learning that bit further; they expect and receive well reasoned responses. All staff use praise to good effect to motivate and encourage pupils. If concentration strays, a firm, early word from teachers ensures that pupils are brought quickly back to task. This successful management, coupled with continuing strong relationships, boosts learning. Most lessons are conducted at a good pace, though now and again the edge is lost because the planned timing slips. This sometimes results in rushed endings to the lessons, so that teachers miss the opportunity to check pupils' understanding.

Teachers' higher expectations of pupils have resulted, for the most part, in work in pupils' books that is plentiful and of good quality. In most classes marking is thorough and linked to pupils' targets. It indicates clearly to pupils how they might improve. Where this is not always the case, it reflects lower expectations and inconsistencies in adhering to the agreed marking policy. The school's own monitoring has picked this up as an area for further development.

The curriculum, care guidance and support continue to improve. Transition arrangements between Key Stages 1 and 2 have been strengthened and this has helped Year 3 pupils to settle more quickly. 'The Big Write' initiative is clearly exciting pupils and motivating them to write, with significant impact on boys. Similarly, changes in the mathematics curriculum are showing early signs of improving the planning and delivery of lessons. The school has recently changed the timing of the formal assessments of pupils from half termly to termly. As a result, it is not as easy for the senior leaders to use teachers' ongoing assessments to check on the progress pupils make in the interim.

Progress on the issue identified at the inspection:

- Ensure that the quality of teaching, pace of learning and expectations of what pupils in Key Stage 2 can achieve are consistently good enough to ensure that pupils perform at their best – good.

### Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are working effectively as a team. They have set a clear agenda for improvement and are focusing rigorously on driving up standards. They are well supported in this task by the governing body, who go from strength to strength in developing their ability not only to support, but also to challenge, the school. They are closely involved in making key decisions, such as how to use a recently acquired grant to best effect to tackle underachievement. This has resulted in the astute deployment of extra support staff, which is already starting to pay dividends, particularly in Years 3, 5 and 6. All staff are strongly committed to providing the best quality of education for the pupils and there is a real feeling of optimism evident. This is seen most clearly in the recently implemented 'Big Write' initiative, where enthusiastic, skilful teaching is rubbing off on the pupils and underpinning their improving progress.

The leadership team has further refined the systems for checking on the work of the school. They are sharing the responsibility for the work more widely among other senior managers. This is accelerating the development of subject leaders within their areas of responsibility and is enabling them to have a wider impact on teaching and learning. For example, they take the lead in checking on teachers' planning and ensuring its suitability and consistency. They also take greater involvement in analysing pupils' work and feeding back to staff on what might be improved and are also playing a stronger part in checking on how effectively new initiatives are being implemented throughout the school. Most importantly, this is also freeing up valuable management time to allow the headteacher to focus more sharply on strategic planning and get to grips with how best to tackle underachievement.

The school's expertise in assessing pupils' learning and using the information to identify the next steps for pupils is developing well. There is a good range of information on pupils' progress available. However, this needs to be managed more effectively to ensure that any underachievement of particular groups or individuals can be quickly identified and remedied.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school and develop rigorous systems of self-evaluation – good.

#### External support

The LA continues to provide high quality support for the school. The school has increasingly taken the initiative in setting its own improvement agenda, as it continues to develop its ability to move forward. However, the LA remains responsive to the school's requests and acts effectively in the role of 'critical friend'. The good work of the LA's contact officers and consultants is greatly valued by the leadership team, staff and governors.

#### Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for improvement remain those identified at the time of the inspection in May 2006.