

20 September 2007

Mr Ian Chester  
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Dear Mr Chester

#### Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff, the Chair of Governors and Local Authority (LA) gave me when I inspected your school on 19 September 2007, and for the time you gave to our phone discussions and the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the children who met with me and gave such a positive and confident contribution.

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 October 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement in English and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2;
- add further pace to lessons and make sure that their purpose is clear to the pupils;
- provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects of the curriculum.

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' achievements. Action plans to improve the areas identified at the last inspection are well established and the school has received good support from the LA. Several changes to the responsibilities of staff have brought about fresh ideas, enthusiasm and commitment. Overall, the key factor in the school's progress is the greater consistency of good teaching practice across the school. Additionally the need to raise standards is at the forefront of all improvement plans. The determination of governors to succeed is illustrated by the rigorous way in which new appointments to teaching staff have been made.

The school has appropriate strategies to raise standards. Good procedures for tracking pupils' progress identify the pupils who have learning difficulties, and effective support is provided. Teachers are deployed well to maximise their expertise. A whole-school approach to curriculum planning means that lessons have more purpose and a common structure. Targets are set for pupils based on what they can already do. Pupils are making improved progress but these strategies are not yet sufficiently embedded so that pupils attain as well as they should in national tests.

The provisional results of national tests in Year 6 for 2007 demonstrate that standards in English, mathematics and science have risen. Although they remain well below average, the percentages attaining the expected levels have improved and this includes the scores for the highest attaining pupils. Nevertheless the school's own data reveals variation in how much progress pupils make between subjects and year groups. For example, in writing, Year 6 made only half the expected rate of progress whereas Year 4 made almost double the rate. Whilst targets for pupils' attainment were met in most parts of the school, Year 6 pupils still fell some way short of the percentages agreed for them with governors and the LA. In Year 2 teacher assessments in 2007, standards declined in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school's detailed data reveals that this group of pupils had lower prior attainment than is usual in this school. Targets are often in need of updating on a regular basis because of the high number of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual times, together with very high numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language. Pupils' progress is rigorously tracked by the school and shows improved rates across the school in most year groups. Pockets of weak progress are being eradicated as consistently better teaching begins to focus more effectively upon targeted learning. The school and LA agree that there is greater accuracy in the measurement of attainment for the current Year 3 and 4 than is the case for pupils in Year 5 and 6, due to better staff training and moderation by the LA.

Lesson observations carried out by the school and LA indicate improvement to the pace of learning and to the consistency of good practice. Inspection of lessons confirms this view. Teachers plan to identical formats which detail clear objectives for learning. Pupils respond well to activities, which have a clear purpose that is explained fully at the start of the lesson and which is regularly revisited to check pupils' progress. Some pupils spoke about how there are many more practical things to do in lessons, such as experiments in science. As one pupil commented, 'You get to use the stuff and don't lose interest.' Pupils say that the teachers give much help and find time for everyone, and they use targets nearly every day. Pupils write their own targets for 'what we can get better at'. Parents are made increasingly aware of their children's targets through consultation evenings and daily journals.

Pupils said that they enjoy school and that there is more creative work which allows them to practise their basic skills within different subjects. In response to the issue raised at the last inspection, the school produces creativity webs at the beginning of each term to plan how pupils will develop their basic skills in literacy and numeracy through different subjects. Castercliff has an established range of 'creative partners'

who work in school during themed weeks or projects. For example, a 'making stories' project included help from an illustrator, a writer and a poet and had a strong focus on developing the speaking and listening skills of pupils. The school carefully measured the pupils' writing skills before and after this initiative; the results show that many pupils made good advances in their learning.

The school is receiving good help from the LA. The LA's initial statement of action needs revising in the light of the school's current progress to ensure the timescales fit the school's own plans for improvement. Consultant and advisory support is helping staff to improve the quality of subject provision. You and your deputy, together with the school's governors, are benefiting strongly from the guidance provided by the school improvement partner.

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

Yours sincerely

John Coleman  
Her Majesty's Inspector