

28 February 2008

Liam Fry
Lark Hill Community Primary School
Liverpool Street
Salford
Lancashire
M5 4BJ

Dear Mr Fry

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the Vice Chair of Governors, the staff and pupils whom I met.

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 July 2007, the school was asked to: raise standards and accelerate the learning of all children in English, mathematics and science, especially at Key Stage 2; improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school; and improve the effectiveness of subject leadership, particularly in science.

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

Standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 remain very low. The results of the 2007 tests for seven-year-old and 11-year-olds showed little improvement on the previous year. In Key Stage 2, results in English, mathematics and science remained below government targets. In Key Stage 1, there was an improvement in writing scores but results fell again in reading and in mathematics. Boys fared particularly badly in reading: the gap between the school's score for boys and the national score widened further.

To a great extent, the test results are reflected in the work seen in books and in lessons. In Key Stage 2, the work in books is of below average standard, but pupils are making good progress generally as the teaching more accurately matches their current level of understanding. There remain large gaps in pupils' knowledge: for

example, Year 4 pupils struggle to multiply by 100 and have little understanding of place value and Year 6 pupils have difficulty improving their writing because they do not have a command of parts of speech such as personal pronouns. The greatest progress is evident in science, where the efforts of the subject leader are paying dividends. New assessment procedures for science, tighter monitoring of teachers' planning, and a review of how units will be taught have contributed to a significant rise in the quality of work produced by pupils and in their levels of knowledge and understanding. The rate of pupils' progress remains uneven though: it is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1.

The quality of teaching observed on this visit ranged from outstanding to inadequate. The profile of teaching in Key Stage 2 is now stronger than that in Key Stage 1; it is consistently good or better in upper Key Stage 2. This quality of teaching needs to be developed across the school as quickly as possible but specifically in Key Stage 1 to raise standards there so that teachers in Key Stage 2 are not constantly 'playing catch up'.

In some classes, lessons are too long and over a week the timetable is unbalanced. The over-long lessons mean that teachers stretch out their introductions and explanations and pupils spend too much time listening and not enough time working independently. In the weaker lessons there is still insufficient attention paid to the differing abilities of groups, especially the more able pupils, and teachers' expectations are too low. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 1 where, for example, children who left the Reception class able to write simple sentences unaided are not routinely expected to write at length during lessons. The pace of learning is too slow in Key Stage 1. Pupils, especially the more able, could do a lot more. In contrast, where the teaching is of a high order, as in upper Key Stage 2, teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve, set a brisk pace to the lesson and present significant levels of challenge. Consequently, the pupils respond well and make more rapid progress. Levels of enjoyment in these lessons are high.

At the last inspection, although not reported as a key area for improvement, the inspection team commented upon the narrowing of the school's curriculum. This visit identified some weaknesses in the school's timetables. These include: slippage of time and significant amounts of additional time devoted to literacy and numeracy lessons each day that do not add substantially to the pupils' standards or enjoyment of their work. As a result, there appears to be insufficient time allocated to the foundation subjects and this calls into question the ability of the school to provide the full National Curriculum, ensuring breadth and continuity across the year groups. The school's attendance rate, although within the broadly average range, is nevertheless below the national figure. The pupils with most persistence absence are those identified by the school as also in receipt of additional literacy and numeracy support.

There has been good progress in the development of subject leaders, who now show leadership skills in managing and driving forward their subjects. Their focus is set firmly on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. They have been provided with additional time to undertake their role and this has resulted in tighter

monitoring of lesson planning, observations of teaching, regular reviews of pupils' progress and opportunities to support other staff.

The local authority has planned and provided good support for the school through the school improvement officer and consultants.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela M Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector