

09 October 2008

Mr Roger Shone
Headteacher
Castle Park School
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Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 6BE

Dear Mr Shone

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 8 October 2008, 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, governors, and to the staff for speaking so openly about the improvement the school has made since the inspection.

The school was given a notice to improve in January 2008. Since that time, one teacher has left, one is on leave for 12 months and three teachers started at the school.

As a result of the inspection in January 2008 the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science
- to ensure the quality of teaching is consistently good or better;
- to use information from tracking pupils' progress and from monitoring the quality of provision to ensure that pupils are always provided with suitably challenging and engaging work.

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

The school has made considerable efforts to improve assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress. Effective systems have been implemented which are having a positive impact on achievement. These systems are rigorous but easy to use, which has enabled all staff to identify which groups are still underachieving and where progress has been made. Governors and senior leaders are better placed to use the systems to monitor the progress of groups of pupils and individuals. Frequent pupil progress meetings with teachers have introduced greater accountability and have

focused teachers on the progress that pupils make in their classes. This has resulted in greater challenge in lessons, and more appropriate work being set. A sample of pupils who were interviewed knew their targets and what they had to do to improve their work. They said that lessons were more interesting, not too easy and that teaching had improved. Visits to a sample of classrooms confirmed this view. Teachers, and effectively deployed teaching assistants, ask good questions and have good relationships with pupils. Most lessons are good, involve pupils as active learners, move at a brisk pace with teaching that is often dynamic and exciting. As a consequence, standards are rising.

In Key Stage 1, standards in reading and mathematics are now in line with national expectations. Unvalidated assessment and test results for 2008 indicate that almost 90% of pupils attained the expected Level 2 in reading, an increase of 25% from the previous year: in mathematics almost every child attained Level 2. In writing, although standards are rising, they remain below the national average; only two thirds of pupils attained Level 2 in 2008. This, in part, is because not all opportunities are taken to extend and develop pupils' writing skills. Some tasks and worksheets limit pupils' progress because they require only minimal thinking and writing skills. In Key Stage 2, standards are also rising. Teachers are working hard to tackle the underachievement of the past and to fill the gaps in pupils' skills and learning. Most pupils reach age-related standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. Although their writing skills remain under-developed, the school is making good use of local authority support to improve the teaching of writing. The rate that pupils progress in Key Stage 2 is accelerating, particularly in mathematics. In some year groups, there has been double the expected rate of progress.

Support provided by the local authority is good. The authority has increased the amount of time which the advisers, consultants, advanced skills teachers and governors' services spend in the school. Under the clear direction of the headteacher, the agenda for improvement and for support has come directly from the school and this has meant a tight focus on the key areas requiring most improvement. Senior and middle leaders are well-trained and now feel autonomous and empowered to drive forward improvements for pupils. This is helping the school to make rapid improvements in the quality of its provision. Improvements to the school's systems identified at the last inspection have become embedded, refined and improved. This has provided a firm bedrock for the improvement of standards and achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector