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Mr Mark Gallacher
The Interim Headteacher
Huntingtower Community Primary School
Huntingtower Road
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Dear Mr Gallacher

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 9 June, 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 in particular to the chair of governors, the deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team, the school improvement adviser and the pupils I had the opportunity to talk to during the day. I was also grateful for the opportunity to meet the new headteacher and another member of the governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 15 and 16 October 2007, the school was asked to establish leadership that gave a clear educational direction; improve the accuracy of assessment and the use made of it to track progress and identify underachievement; and to raise teachers' expectations so that pupils, particularly the more able, made better progress. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Since January, the school has been led and managed by an interim headteacher, appointed by the local authority. A permanent headteacher has been appointed to the school, to start in September. The school has continued to experience some disruption in staffing and by the end of this term six of the 11 class teachers will be on maternity leave. The school is to take part in the improving schools programme in September. The local authority has provided satisfactory support for the school and the school improvement adviser has worked well, in close partnership with the school, to provide support and guidance.

The interim headteacher has done very well in stabilising the school and ensuring that each class has a teacher. Staff morale has been raised and the school is calm and positive. Structures have been established and there is greater consistency, particularly through the new leadership team. Members have clear responsibilities and are starting to take the initiative, to question and challenge. Good progress has

been made in focusing the permanent and long-term staff on raising standards, although there is still a long way to go, particularly in developing subjects other than English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (the core). Increasingly reliable assessment data has been used to regroup classes by age-group and ability, and intervention strategies are based on this information, supporting better progress. In the past, the school has used data from different types of tests, which are difficult to compare and particularly to measure progress. Nevertheless, the current data gives the school and teachers a clearer picture of attainment and achievement, although some strategies for displaying this are much more accessible than others. Teachers and subject leaders are being made more accountable for standards. Improvement in resources, such as the interactive whiteboards, has enthused pupils and teachers. Provision for the increasing numbers of pupils whose first language is not English is being reorganised suitably. The governing body is developing well and members have developed their expertise through training and curriculum links with subject leaders, and are therefore keeping better track of the school's progress.

Teaching remains broadly satisfactory, with some elements that are good, although there is still inconsistency, often as a result of frequent staff changes. Assessment is increasingly being used to inform planning and the grouping of pupils, and there is more evidence of tasks being designed to meet individual needs but not well enough for the more able. There is some good use of ongoing assessment to refocus lessons. Teachers are involving pupils more in lessons, through sharing the intended outcomes with them and often assisting them to identify the features that will show that they have succeeded. Pupils find their targets helpful; however, while they are eager to please they have not developed good listening skills. There is some good use of questioning, but this is not targeted sufficiently. Relationships between pupils and with staff are positive. However, pupils tend to rely on adults rather than trying things out for themselves, and are not as independent as would be expected for their age. Few volunteer to answer questions in lessons, although they trust their teachers and are willing to admit that they have not understood.

There is some good classroom display, to celebrate and stimulate. Some marking is effective, and pupils find it helpful. Teachers are starting to use work in other subjects to develop and use pupils' skills in the core subjects, particularly English, but this is at an early stage and they have insufficient opportunities to write across the curriculum. There is some way to go in developing the satisfactory curriculum into a coherent and consistently interesting one.

Due to the focused work being done, the decline in standards has been halted. Children make at least satisfactory progress in Foundation Stage. The most recent Key Stage 1 results are an improvement on those in 2007. Although Year 6 pupils have made better progress in the past few months, they may not reach their targets this year. Standards throughout the school are still below average and the more able are not yet doing well enough. Because Year 5 has been the focus of significant interventions and support, standards are rising and are likely to be similar to those expected for their age. Progress in Years 3 and 4 has been a matter for concern but recent assessments show accelerated progress. Through the whole school, progress in reading is most evident, but in writing it is slow, and there are too few

opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. Presentation in upper Key Stage 2 is poor and few pupils join their writing. Progress in mathematics is adequate, although there are weaknesses in multiplication, division and the application of mathematical skills and knowledge.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs P C Cox

Additional Inspector