

02 April 2009

Mr A Littlehales
Headteacher
Morley Place Junior School
Old Road
Conisbrough
Doncaster
DN12 3LZ

Dear Mr Littlehales

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 01 April 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the chair of governors, staff and pupils on my behalf for their helpful contributions to the inspection.

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.

Since the time of the inspection in July 2008 the school has experienced several staffing changes, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher.

As a result of the inspection on 09 and 10 July 2008, the school was asked to do the following.

- Raise standards and improve the achievement of all pupils, particularly in writing.
- Ensure that teaching consistently matches pupils' capabilities, needs and interests so that the quality of learning improves, particularly for the less able pupils.

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 pupils' achievement.

The school's most recent assessment data indicate that the downward trend in standards prior to 2008 has been halted. School data show current standards in mathematics and science are similar to those attained in 2008. However, standards in English have risen, which suggests pupils are beginning to overcome the legacy of underachievement. More Year 6 pupils than in 2008 are currently on track to reach

the expected level for their age in both writing and reading. This improvement is largely a result of more focused activities to help pupils structure their writing. However, although there are signs of improved levels of achievement, especially in English, the school is unlikely to reach its very challenging targets.

School leaders are keeping a closer check on pupils' progress through recently refined systems and meetings about pupils' progress. The school has a clearer picture of what each pupil knows and pupils who are not performing as well as expected are targeted with more specific support. Although there are signs of improved rates of progress in some classes, it is too soon to see the full impact of these measures. In addition, the school has identified some gaps in the curriculum and in pupils' learning, through more thorough analysis of test results and assessment data. However, school leaders do not always make effective use of this information to directly inform their plans for school improvement or to closely target specific areas of weakness throughout the school.

The school has developed more consistent use of effective teaching strategies to improve the quality of learning throughout school. Opportunities to liaise with colleagues in another school have helped to improve teaching, as staff have had the chance to work alongside each other and to share ideas. Teachers have undergone some whole-school training, and regular monitoring by school leaders and the local authority. This rigour is bringing about some improvements to lessons.

School leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The school is beginning to improve practice and to remove the weaker aspects of teaching and this is leading to signs of faster progress in some classes. The quality of planning has improved and lessons now have a clear focus. Positive relationships are evident throughout school. Pupils are keen to learn and they behave well. In the best lessons there has been an increased emphasis on group work, and speaking and listening activities. As a result, pupils' enjoyment in discussing their learning together is greater and they are stretched more effectively in their thinking. In such lessons pupils are working at a faster pace; they are more actively involved in assessing their own learning and in considering how they can improve their work further.

Nevertheless, inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching remain. There is still some way to go to ensure that all teaching is of a good enough standard to improve pupils' achievement further and to eradicate the prior weaknesses in their learning. The school acknowledges the need to provide more opportunities to share the best practice throughout school. Although the quality and accuracy of assessment has improved, this is not always used effectively to pitch work precisely at the correct level. In some lessons the pace of learning remains slower because learning activities lack challenge and pupils are given too much time to complete an activity so their interest wanes. Teaching assistants give sensitive support to the less able pupils. This enables them to participate in activities alongside their peers. However, learning activities are not always adapted well enough to meet their needs. In particular, opportunities to learn through more practical activities are not fully

utilised. The quality of marking remains variable. Although pupils are often praised for what they have achieved, there is sometimes limited feedback to let them know how to improve further.

The local authority is contributing to school improvement through a well-designed programme. This is providing support for the school leadership team and is leading to increased rigour and accuracy in the school's monitoring of teaching and learning. Comprehensive reviews have been undertaken and practical help has been provided to increase some pupils' progress in key subject areas, particularly English. The school has improved since the last inspection. However, the criteria by which improvements can be measured are not always clear enough. This can make it difficult for school leaders, staff and governors to check that their work is having the desired impact on the school's performance.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Gowers
Additional Inspector