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2 April 2009

Mrs S Lloyd
Headteacher
Hope Valley Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lloyd

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 April 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, the local authority representatives, staff and groups of pupils who gave of their time to meet with me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 March 2008, the school was asked to address three areas for improvement: to raise standards in both key stages, particularly in writing; to improve the overall quality of teaching so that it promotes pupils' better achievement; and to improve the rigour with which pupils' progress is checked and tracked.

Since the inspection a new headteacher, an Early Years Foundation Stage manager and a Key Stage 1 teacher have been appointed, the latter having recently taken up post as mathematics subject leader. A new chair of governors joined the school in January 2009. Plans to federate the school with Breckfield Primary School in September 2009 are currently out for consultation.

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' achievement.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are well below those expected of children their age. Their skills in communication and

language, their knowledge and understanding of the world and their social and emotional development are particularly low. Children are currently making at least satisfactory progress in their learning but are still working below national expectations when they start Key Stage 1. The 2008 Key Stage 1 assessments and Key Stage 2 tests were taken soon after the last inspection and before changes were made to leadership, governance and staffing. The unvalidated results show that attainment in reading and writing improved at Key Stage 1 but was still well below the national average. Attainment in mathematics fell and was also well below average. Performance in English improved at Key Stage 2 but fell in mathematics and science. Pupils did not make the expected progress from the levels they achieved at Key Stage 1 and their achievement in all subjects was below that of similar schools.

Improvement has been more rapid in the last two terms. The strong and determined drive of the headteacher and the concerted efforts of staff have brought about improvements to teaching which are beginning to raise pupils' achievement. Pupils are now making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. Pupils in Year 2 are on track to achieve better results in the end of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2009. Pupils in Year 6 are also on track to achieve the challenging academic targets which have been set for the cohort. Although these targets are below the national average, they represent good progress from pupils' low starting points. Pupils in the current Year 5 class are making very good progress; predicted outcomes based on their current level of work indicate that targets for 2010 will be exceeded. Attendance has improved and 2009 targets are likely to be met.

Pupils are making better progress because teaching is more engaging and meaningful, particularly in writing. The small amount of teaching sampled during the inspection confirmed that teaching is being more closely matched to pupils' ability and needs. Good quality professional development has supported staff in developing their skills and in implementing whole school initiatives. Actions taken to improve the teaching of writing, develop the language skills of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and establish consistent approaches to lesson planning, marking and assessment are proving effective. Recent changes to the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enabling teachers to identify and support their specific needs earlier.

Teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding, with weaker teaching most evident in mathematics. School leaders are aware of where improvement is needed. They are ensuring that good practice is shared across the school through peer coaching and further professional development. Where teaching is most effective, pupils are able to make links with their prior learning and are given opportunities to apply their understanding of new concepts to challenging independent activities. Where weaker teaching was observed, it was because some pupils did not have sufficient understanding to complete set tasks independently or because the pace of learning was too slow in teacher-directed activities. The supportive approach of teachers and good relationships are a strength in all lessons and, consequently, pupils are well behaved and cooperative. Older pupils particularly enjoy opportunities

to mark their own and other pupils' work and to 'share different strategies for working out'. Pupils enjoy their lessons and grow in confidence with the encouragement of teachers and teaching assistants.

Good pastoral care and very good safeguarding procedures are firmly in place. Pupils feel safe and well cared for knowing that, 'teachers will sort out any problems in the playground and help you with your work'. Rigorous systems to check and track pupils' academic progress in reading, writing and mathematics have been developed. All teachers record the levels at which each pupil is working onto a whole school database. The assessments are moderated through work scrutiny and observation by school leaders and they form the basis for a pupil progress meeting between the headteacher and each teacher every six weeks. Where there is evidence of underachievement the school is acting quickly to support pupils and provide professional development for staff. The challenging academic targets set for pupils are also used to inform performance management. This, together with a more effective approach to marking and target setting, is ensuring that teachers are raising their expectations of what each pupil can achieve and are supporting pupils' in raising their own aspirations.

The headteacher's clear vision, her impressive leadership and determination to improve provision and drive standards upwards are key factors in the recent improvements. She is being well supported by key members of the strengthened leadership team and governing body and through the commitment of staff. They are welcoming opportunities to develop both their teaching and leadership skills through external training and by playing a full part in the school's self-review and strategic planning. The local authority, governors and staff have a high level of confidence in the headteacher and are fully supportive of the changes being made. Governors are well informed and feel empowered to challenge the school and hold its leaders to account. They are making a good contribution to planning and evaluation through the recently established committees.

The school is engaging effectively with the local authority, which has provided good support to build the school's capacity and develop the staff's skills through supported self-review and professional development. With the secure systems that have been put in place, the continued commitment of staff and support of the local authority, the school is well placed to bring about further improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector