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Ms Gillian Blatherwick
The Headteacher
Hazel Primary School and Community Centre
Hazel Street
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Dear Mrs Blatherwick

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 15 January 2009, 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 staff, pupils, chair of governors and the local authority for their cooperation during my visit.

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 on 1 and 2 July 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and progress of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2
- increase the amount of good teaching and, in particular, ensure that teaching is closely matched to pupils' needs and consistently challenges the more able
- implement a curriculum with sufficient depth and breadth that meets the needs of all pupils and develops skills in literacy and numeracy in different subjects
- provide all pupils with clear guidance, through marking and targets, to help them to improve their performance.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with staff, pupils, the chair of governors and the local authority, an analysis of pupils' work and school documentation, and the observation of lessons.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the points for improvement. Satisfactory progress has been made in raising pupils' achievement, particularly at Key Stage 2, although attainment remains well below the national average.

There have been considerable staffing difficulties due to staff absence since the last inspection, and there are more changes to come before the end of term. The deputy

headteacher has been absent due to ill health for two months. There is also a high level of pupil mobility across all the year groups. This, combined with the delay in implementing the Leicester City challenge programme, has presented considerable difficulties to the school and the headteacher. The school has responded well to these challenges and it has kept school improvement at the heart of its agenda. The school's actions have been focused and appropriate, and well led by the headteacher.

Standards at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Years 2 and 6 remain well below national averages. However, the school's own data and lesson observations confirm that pupils are making satisfactory progress by the end of EYFS and Key Stage 1. Although pupils' progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 2, it varies between year groups because some teachers lack the expertise to assess accurately where pupils are at and what they need to do to help them improve. Assessment procedures have improved at senior management level and regular observations and reviews of children's learning are undertaken using set criteria. However, this information is not used effectively by all teachers. Pupils in Year 6 are making better progress than pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 because of the intensive support they receive.

Monitoring and evaluation at senior management level have improved and the school has records of every pupil and the level at which they are working. There is clear guidance through marking and targets to help pupils improve their performance. However, this information is not always used by class teachers to inform their planning. A programme of lesson observations has ensured that the headteacher has a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and areas of development in the school. However, these observations are not yet rigorous enough to enable some of the staff to improve their practice. Feedback to teachers about the quality of their work is helping staff to make improvements, but this is not consistent across the school. Lessons observed jointly with the headteacher during the visit were mainly satisfactory. The school's own monitoring procedures confirm that the quality of teaching remains variable across the school. In the lessons observed there was too much talking by teachers and work was pitched at the middle ability range so that the higher and lower attainers were not sufficiently challenged. Pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to work independently and to engage in discussions and teachers' expectations are not high enough.

The school is aware that it needs to quicken the pace of improvement with some teachers who continue to lack the expertise in assessing pupils' needs more accurately. Furthermore, not enough is expected of pupils in terms of the amount of work that should be completed in lesson time. Marking is improving, but remains inconsistent across the school. As a result of the inconsistencies in teaching and in the use of assessment, standards in English and mathematics have not risen in line with the school's targets and remain lower than average.

The school has worked well to improve the curriculum which has sufficient depth and breadth so that it meets the needs of all pupils. However, it is still working on ensuring that literacy and numeracy are built into different subjects.

The headteacher, with the support from the local authority, is beginning to tackle the issues rigorously and has high aspirations for the school. The chair of governors is highly supportive and has a good understanding of the school's needs. The school's evaluation of its provision and outcomes is fair and informs action planning reasonably well. However, the headteacher recognises that the school's Raising Attainment Plan needs to be reviewed in the light of some of the changes that have occurred in the last term. The headteacher has been ably supported by the local authority. The local authority recognises that decisive actions need to be taken to build the capacity of the leadership and management team within the school, particularly as the deputy headteacher has been absent for two months. Staff in the school continue to be positive and enthusiastic about the changes being introduced to enable them to improve their practice.

All of the necessary employment checks are carried out and all staff, including supply teachers, are appropriately vetted to confirm their suitability to work with children. However, governors are not yet included in the school's single central record.

The statement of action produced by the local authority following the last inspection met requirements and the level of local authority support and guidance has been satisfactory. The local authority is currently reviewing its plan so that it is line with that of the school's Raising Attainment Plan. This will enable the school and the local authority to work more effectively so that both are in a better position to respond to the difficulties the school has had with its staffing. The local authority regularly monitors the school's development and provides it with appropriate support which has been crucial in halting the school's decline. However, the local authority has not been quick enough in putting some of the crucial developments linked with the Leicester City challenge programme into the school. The school effectiveness committee meetings and the linked support have enabled the school to set out its priorities and tackle issues with reasonable vigour. However, both the school and the local authority recognise that the pace and rate of improvement in all the areas identified in the last inspection need to be quickened if the school is to move forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector