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Mrs S Stevenson
Headteacher
Crackley Bank Primary School
Blackthorn Place
Newcastle
Staffordshire
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Dear Mrs Stevenson,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19-20 October 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided during my visit. Would you please pass on my thanks to the staff, chair of governors, the local authority officer and pupils.

Since the last inspection there have been several changes to the staffing. Shortly after the end of the last inspection, the headteacher took maternity leave and returned to school at the start of the summer term 2009. During this period, the school was led and managed by a temporary headteacher. The teacher of Year 3 left the school at the end of the autumn term 2008. She was replaced by two temporary teachers, each covering a term. The deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term 2009. The governors decided to change the leadership structure and did not replace the post of deputy headteacher. Instead, two of the teachers already employed at the school were appointed as assistant headteachers. An additional teacher was also employed to cover the former deputy headteacher's teaching responsibilities. One of the assistant headteachers is currently taking maternity leave. Her teaching responsibility is covered by a temporary teacher. In all, one-third of the current teaching staff commenced employment at the school in September 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 30 September-1 October 2008, the school was asked to;

- increase the proportion of good teaching across the school to accelerate pupils' progress, ensuring it is sufficiently challenging for all pupils
- raise standards across the school, and in particular Years 1 to 4, ensuring good use is made of information from assessments



- improve attendance
- improve the planning for the six areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and especially the use made of outdoor and imaginative play areas.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

inadequate progress in making improvements and

inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Although the 2009 end of Key Stage 2 unvalidated test results showed a decline in pupils' attainment from 2008, the school data show that pupils' attainment is beginning to rise in most year groups. For example, the end of the 2008 and 2009 school year tests and teacher assessments showed that: the proportion of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils who reached their age related levels in reading improved from 28% in 2008 to 43% in 2009; in writing it improved from 26% to 36% and in mathematics it improved from 42% to 46%. Pupils' progress is also improving and more pupils are now reaching their targets than in previous years. During the past year, pupils in some year groups made good and, occasionally, outstanding progress.

However, although pupils' achievement overall since the last inspection has shown some improvement, there were too many classes where pupils' progress remained too slow, because teaching in those classes was inadequate. Where this occurred, assessment information was not used carefully enough to ensure that the work given to pupils was sufficiently challenging. The local authority monitoring report carried out in May 2009 showed that, although the proportion of good and better teaching had improved since the previous inspection, one in four lessons observed was inadequate. Because of these inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, pupils' attainment has not improved fast enough and remains low. Consequently, the rate of improvement in accelerating pupils' progress and raising standards is inadequate.

Since the start of this term, the staffing has been much more stable, and the headteacher's monitoring shows that the quality of teaching has improved. No inadequate lessons were observed during the monitoring inspection and pupils' learning in many lessons was good. However, this improvement has not been sustained long enough and has not yet had an impact on raising pupils' achievement. Since her return to school, the headteacher has renewed the emphasis on teachers using information on pupils' progress to help them match work to pupils' capabilities. In some classes this is developing well, but it is inconsistent and, consequently, some pupils are still not challenged as well as they could be.

In the year following the last inspection, there was no improvement in the rate of pupils' attendance, which continued to be below average. However, since her return to school, the headteacher has more rigorously implemented the initiatives previously established. Pupils are now more enthusiastic to gain the rewards for regular attendance and parents are often approached personally by the headteacher if there are attendance issues. Attendance for this half term is average, which is a significant improvement from the same half-term in 2008.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved considerably since the last inspection. The appointment of an experienced teacher into the Nursery class, additional resources and effective support from the local authority have contributed towards detailed planning which covers all six areas of learning. More effective use of play to stimulate children's imagination and better use of the outdoor environment are helping the children develop a wider range of skills.

The absence of the headteacher, the resignation of the deputy headteacher, the current temporary absence of the assistant headteacher and the appointment of several temporary teachers over the past year has meant that the staffing and leadership of the school have been unstable for most of the time since the last inspection. Although helpful support to the school has been given by the local authority and some progress has been made, especially from the start of this term, the overall rate of improvement has been too slow. Consequently, leaders have not been able to demonstrate sufficient capacity for sustained improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

