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Mr John Vasey
Headteacher
Stanhope Primary School
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Dear Mr Vasey

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the staff and pupils who took the time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection there have been no changes to staffing. The school is in negotiations with the local authority to build a new school on the site for September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on the 12 and 13 November 2008, the school was asked to do the following in Key Stage 2.

- Raise standards and increase achievement, particularly of the more able pupils.
- Extend the proportion of good features in teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Improve the analysis of the data on pupils' progress and use these data to provide work that matches pupils' needs more closely.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The school has been successful in raising attainment and levels of achievement. In the unvalidated 2009 end of Year 6 assessments standards rose in English and significantly so in mathematics and science. The attainment of the more able pupils

rose in all three subjects, showing improved achievement for these pupils. This was a direct result of the improved tracking of pupils' progress and through participation in the national Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) pilot which the local authority is involved in. The use of APP materials to assess how well pupils are doing is well embedded across the school. This has raised teachers' awareness of pupils who are underachieving and enables teachers to plan lessons which better meet the needs of all pupils in classes. Rigorous termly tracking of this progress leads to pupils in Year 3 to Year 6 being entered for single level tests when the school thinks they are ready. The results of these tests show that teachers have a secure knowledge of what level pupils are working at and the improved tracking is helping to accelerate progress, especially for the more able pupils. Marking of pupils' work is carried out regularly.

Teaching and learning has improved and there are a higher proportion of good lessons than at the time of the previous inspection. Throughout the school lessons show common features. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject matter and plan lessons which match the needs of at least three different groups in the class. The introduction of daily structured phonic sessions across the school, where pupils are grouped by ability regardless of age, and the introduction of a commercial reading and writing scheme are having a positive impact on improving literacy skills across the school. This was observed during the visit where pupils showed knowledge of a range of strategies for reading unfamiliar words. There are daily opportunities for reading aloud, reading in pairs and many opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning with teachers. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilful in asking questions about the texts in books which make pupils think and reflect on their reading and this improves comprehension. Pupils said that lessons have improved and that they enjoy reading and writing taught in this way. Pupils observed during lessons were fully engaged in their learning for substantial periods of time and behaviour was exemplary.

Lessons move along at a brisk pace and teachers have high expectations of what can be achieved in the time available. This has improved pupils' expectations and self-esteem. In mathematics lessons pupils were able to solve problems using their mathematical knowledge. For example, nine-year-old pupils were in the hall solving a range of challenging capacity and measure problems. These pupils were confidently reading a range of scales, mentally adding and subtracting numbers in the thousands and they knew how to convert litres to millilitres and metres to centimetres quickly, in order to answer the questions. Older pupils could use ratio and proportion to work out amounts of ingredients in a recipe. In both lessons pupils worked diligently and there was a high level of enjoyment and a lively atmosphere.

The curriculum has improved through a revision of subjects so that topics are taught together under a themed approach. Pupils like this approach and there are more opportunities to practise the basic skills of reading and writing. However, in mathematics lessons for older pupils and in some writing activities for younger pupils there was too much use of printed worksheets. The scrutiny of pupils' books

confirmed this and this limits pupils' ability to write at length or learn how to set out their work confidently and neatly in their books.

Members of the leadership team are working closely together. The morale of staff is high and teachers have a renewed sense of ownership of the progress of pupils in their classes. The deputy headteacher has been given more release time to work alongside the headteacher to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. Senior teachers are taking on more responsibility for checking how well things are going and are more involved in school self-evaluation and in working with teachers to track pupils' progress. Senior teachers have a better view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Currently, the school improvement plan is detailed and focused on the correct issues, although actions to address raising attainment are too broad. The school is not yet using the data it collects to plan improvements for specific groups of pupils in different year groups. This makes measuring the impact of its work difficult.

The headteacher has involved more staff in regularly monitoring the school's work through lesson observations, work scrutiny and, with whole-school agreement, trialling of progress and levels of attainment. Currently, lesson monitoring is focused on provision and there is a lack of focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Governors have been trained in how to support and challenge the work of the school. Linked governors and the chair of governors play an active part in the life of the school. They visit frequently and some work regularly in classes with pupils.

The local authority has supported the school well in its improvements. The local authority has provided support through a range of consultants working alongside the staff, in the development of APP, in providing training for governors and in providing funding to enable the school to purchase a commercial reading and writing scheme. The scheme's materials are being well used and are having an impact on reading and writing across the school.

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

Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector