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30 September 2009

Mrs Elaine Armstrong
Headteacher
Hylton Castle Primary School
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Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 3QL

Dear Mrs Armstrong

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 September 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff and parents who gave up their time to meet with me.

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

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science
- raise standards in reading and writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage by improving the teaching of phonics
- develop and implement further strategies for liaising with parents and responding to any of their concerns in a timely manner
- address inadequate teaching and improve the overall percentage of lessons that consistently reach at least a good or better standard.

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

The school has responded positively to the issues identified at its inspection in September 2008. The school's own data, pupils' current work and the unvalidated results of the national tests in 2009 indicate that standards in reading, mathematics and science are beginning to rise by the end of Key Stage 2, particularly for more able pupils in science. However, the proportion of pupils achieving national expectations for age 11 remains below average overall reflecting a legacy of underachievement. Pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points in these subjects. Standards in writing have dropped significantly, compared to last year. Senior leaders are aware of the reasons for this and have taken appropriate steps to address this throughout the school. For example, they have analysed assessment data and samples of pupils' work to identify where individuals need to improve. Tracking systems are used effectively to identify any underachievement and challenging targets have been set for pupils in all year groups, but particularly for the current Year 6. Additional teaching and non-teaching support has been provided through booster classes and individual support has been provided for all pupils who need it, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Standards at the end of Year 2 remain below average, representing satisfactory progress from pupils' starting points. The school is aware that work still needs to be done to raise standards further.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are getting off to a good start, particularly in developing early reading and writing skills. Standards are rising in the Early Years Foundation Stage in all areas of communication, language and literacy skills and this is now having a good effect on pupils' attainment in Year 1. This is partly because of the systematic teaching of phonics on a daily basis, often through games and rhymes which interest and motivate children. Teachers address the learning needs of individual children and provide good opportunities for first hand experiences. This was demonstrated by a young child who had just started Nursery who was fascinated by two snails found in the outdoor learning area. He observed them and produced a drawing and a piece of writing (mark making) demonstrating sustained concentration for an extended period of time.

Senior leaders have responded to the concerns of some parents regarding communication with the school. There are now more opportunities for parents to become involved in the work of the school including attending family learning workshops on literacy, numeracy and family finance as well as helping in classrooms and with school visits. A school improvement group has been established to contribute to discussions on policy and practice in respect of different aspects of school life, such as healthy eating. Parents are consulted more regularly and feel that senior leaders are open and willing to listen to parents' views and concerns. However, although the school has reached out to parents to offer further involvement, relatively few have taken this opportunity.

The proportion of good and better teaching has increased since the inspection in September 2008. As a result, most pupils are making satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. Observations of lessons, scrutiny of planning and pupils' books

confirm these improvements. In the best lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and provide interesting and stimulating activities to engage learners. Pupils say they really enjoy their lessons and that they receive much more guidance on how to improve their work. Marking is helpful and identifies what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils say they are given opportunities to correct or improve their work in the next lesson. Pupils have individual curricular targets which they know and understand, but are not always involved in assessing for themselves when they have been achieved. Speaking and listening skills are promoted well through opportunities for working in pairs and groups and also through extensive opportunities to participate in music and drama including listening and performing. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in the computer suite to support learning, but less often in classrooms where pupils do not always have enough opportunities to use ICT equipment interactively to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Since the inspection in 2008, there have been several changes in staffing. The senior leadership team has been strengthened and good support and challenge has been provided by the local authority and the school improvement partner. Governors are more closely involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, providing effective challenge and support. Staff are held to account because of effective monitoring systems and good support is given through opportunities for mentoring, coaching and sharing good practice. The capacity for sustained improvement is good because of the success already evident in improved outcomes for pupils. This is because of the determination of the headteacher and senior leaders and the commitment and enthusiasm of all of the staff.

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

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector