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Mrs Suzanne Cassidy
Headteacher
Spotland Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cassidy

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues gave when I inspected your school on 18 November 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on the 6 and 7 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards for all pupils and especially higher attaining pupils, particularly in writing
- improve the quality of teaching and the use of support staff so that work is matched more closely to the needs of all pupils and especially the higher attaining pupils
- ensure that all pupils receive the advice they need in order to improve their work
- involve middle managers and classroom teachers consistently in checking pupils' performance in order to raise standards.

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.

This progress has been achieved through a well managed programme of improvement by the staff and governors of the school aided by rigorous support given by specialists from the local authority. The impact of this programme is outlined below. The school has shown a strengthening capacity to manage

improvement and both staff and governors have clear ambitions for further development.

The last inspection noted that a previous decline in standards had been arrested and that there had been improvement between 2007 and 2008 in national test results in Year 6. Subsequently, the tests of 2009 showed another decline. Since then the school has worked with particular vigour to raise standards, especially in English and mathematics. The senior staff have carried out much analysis of attainment and progress based on improved procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. Teachers and their assistants have been well engaged in this strengthening of the school's insight into how well pupils in their classes are progressing. They have embedded clear assessment procedures into their day-to-day teaching and planning, and this has been well supported by the school's performance management procedures and targets. The school has used various methods to raise standards, including for higher attaining pupils, not just in writing but more widely within English and mathematics. It has made effective use of techniques from a range of local and National Curriculum development initiatives. It is currently doing this within a carefully planned campaign to raise attainment in mathematics. In the lessons observed, pupils of different abilities were being properly challenged by the teaching and the work set. They were achieving and making progress at rates which were at least satisfactory and usually good. The school and local authority have accurately identified a further need for standards to be raised, especially among higher attaining pupils, which reflects the obvious motivation of the pupils here to learn and do well, and the increasingly effective teaching which has been developed since the last inspection. Much has been done to bring this rise about. However, the school has not fully developed a sufficiently streamlined and hard-edged focus on the standards being attained throughout the year in each year group. This is impeding progress towards a position where attainment matches that expected nationally for pupils in each of Key Stages 1 and 2.

The school staff have worked hard to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Morale is high among teachers and assistants, and they cooperate well with each other and the senior staff to further this improvement. Well developed procedures are used to evaluate teaching and the school makes effective use of specialists from the local authority to increase the rigour of this evaluation. The senior staff have good evidence to support the judgement that teaching is at least satisfactory throughout the school and is good, sometimes with outstanding qualities, in half of all lessons. In the lessons seen, for most of the time, teaching assistants were very well deployed to support teachers and strengthen pupils' learning, sometimes in an exemplary manner. This is aided by the way in which the school encourages teachers and assistants to plan their work together. The school is working to spread best practice through all classes. The teaching is often well planned to ensure that pupils of all abilities are properly challenged by the work. Such differentiation was very clear and effective in the lessons seen although the school's more long term lesson observation programme shows that higher attaining pupils still sometimes find the work set too easy.

A wide range of development activities has helped senior leaders to bring about this improvement in teaching. Effective use has been made of locally and nationally produced guidelines for good practice. Classroom teaching is richly supported by additional activities such as withdrawal groups and temporary development or support activities which focus on specific aspects of learning. These are not always fully embedded in long term planning and routine classroom practice and the school acknowledges that more needs to be done to secure this. Some of the development has taken the form of detailed coaching of teachers and assistants to develop specific skills. However, such sharply focused coaching is not yet sufficiently widespread to help all teachers and assistants develop specific skills tailored to their individual needs. Also, staff have opportunities to learn from each other and external consultants. However, across the school as a whole, there is still an underdeveloped insight into the nature of the consistently good teaching and high standards which are defining features of highly performing schools.

The guidance given to pupils to help them know how well they are doing and how to improve has developed significantly since the last inspection. It has been much influenced by the school's thoughtful use of national guidelines on how to support learning with better assessment, and developments continue apace in this. The cooperation between teachers and their assistants in planning for teaching and carrying out useful assessment is impressive. Pupils benefit from sharp and personalised target setting as well as lessons which have clearly expressed learning aims and criteria to judge how well pupils meet them. In lessons there is much interaction between adults and pupils and the former are responsive to the needs of the latter. This further strengthens pupils' understanding of how well they are doing. Though the school has worked hard to increase the participation of parents in their children's education, there is some way yet to go to overcome the barriers to fully effective participation. These barriers are reportedly linked to the difficulties some parents have with the English language.

Much has been done to give middle managers the authority, time and confidence to play a fully effective role in checking pupils' performance and evaluating the teaching and planning which supports effective learning. Staff at all levels have a good level of professional involvement and willingness to assume responsibility for pupils' learning. This has made a major contribution to the increasingly collegiate atmosphere among staff and improved teaching and learning. Time is now needed for the middle managers, especially those with relatively short experience in their roles, to develop the consistently high management performance which the school intends.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Toft
Her Majesty's Inspector