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Mr Tony Mallard
Headteacher
Meersbrook Bank Primary School
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Dear Mr Mallard

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to everyone who took time to talk with me, particularly the pupils and the chair of governors.

Since the last inspection, the school has experienced a change in its temporary leadership. Following a successful year in post, the previous lead headteacher was redeployed by the local authority at the end of the summer term 2009. The local authority continues to provide good-quality support for the school. A new lead headteacher is now in place from September 2009 who will lead the school until the appointment of a substantive headteacher.

As a result of the inspection on 03 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- provide work that consistently challenges the most able pupils to reach the higher National Curriculum levels
- ensure that marking always informs pupils how they can improve their work
- improve the quality of the outdoor accommodation for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

In the 2009 tests at the end of Year 6 pupils' attainment, though still broadly average, rose for the second year in succession in English, mathematics and science. Results in science improved the most because a greater proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 5. Smaller gains were made in English and mathematics because fewer pupils reached Level 5. The school's tracking data show that pupils in Year 6 are making accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics, although a greater proportion is on track to attain the higher levels in mathematics than in English. Overall, attainment is likely to fall in 2010 owing to the very different makeup of the current Year 6 cohort. The school's data is becoming more reliable and clearly show pupils' rates of progress over the course of an academic year. However, due to previous assessment inaccuracies, demonstrable improvement in pupils' learning and progress over time has been more difficult to measure. Such inaccuracies have now been eliminated.

Observations during the inspection showed that the quality of teaching is improving with a greater proportion of good teaching and some that is outstanding, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Staff are increasingly confident in assessing pupils' skills and challenging pupils sufficiently to reach higher standards in their work. Assessment systems now in place are providing more accurate information from which to check pupils' progress. In particular, staff are clear about what pupils know, understand and can do and there is a culture of accountability in the school with regard to pupils' termly progress in each class. Teachers plan lessons carefully and ensure appropriate levels of challenge for all groups of pupils. Higher-attaining pupils now receive the focus they require and this is helping more of them to reach the levels of which they are capable in their work. These pupils relish the challenging tasks they now undertake and agree that they waste far less time in lessons. They demonstrate a strong work ethic, often working independently or in pairs while their teacher introduces a different activity to other groups.

The quality of teachers' marking is improving. More staff provide suitable guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. However, inconsistencies remain. Some staff provide first-class guidance while others merely offer praise and encouragement rather than developmental support. Teachers rarely draw pupils' attention to the frequent instances of untidy presentation of work in their books.

Peer assessment and self-assessment are used increasingly well to boost pupils' learning and adults use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding of what they are learning. At the end of some lessons teachers make first-class use of the plenary session to allow pupils plenty of time to work through examples of what they have learned in the lesson, often with pupils coaching each other. This enables pupils to consolidate and extend their learning as they see how their peers approach a task.

Senior leaders have spent much time working on a plan to improve facilities in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A proposal to move the Foundation 2 (Reception) class from its current position upstairs to the ground floor Foundation 1 (Nursery)

building was recently rejected. Reception-age children are therefore still unable to access outdoor provision freely throughout the day. Improvements have been made to the outdoor learning environment and each of the areas of learning is now better represented. Nevertheless, more remains to be done to make this a really attractive learning environment for young children. Currently, insufficient thought is given to making sure that all the activities set out maximise learning opportunities for children. For instance, the creative tables were too small for the large pieces of paper used and this made the tasks unnecessarily awkward for children to complete successfully.

The monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures; these meet current requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Hughes
Lead inspector