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Mrs Christine Buckley
Headteacher
Handale Primary School
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Dear Mrs Buckley

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 June 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I found our on-site preparation on the afternoon of the 29 June very useful. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body and pupils for talking to me during the inspection.

There have been no significant changes to the context of the school since the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 9-10 July 2008, the school was asked to consolidate the use of new teaching initiatives to raise standards in English and mathematics, improve the use of marking across the school and provide more opportunities for senior leaders to find out how well the school is doing, to influence the way forward.

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.

Initiatives to improve the quality of teaching, which were developing at the time of the last inspection, have been embedded across the school and, although some weaker teaching remains, the proportion is low. Senior leaders monitor teaching regularly and key strengths and areas for development are discussed both in staff meetings and through direct support to teachers who need it. The use of filming to observe staff teaching and to discuss outcomes from those observations, provides an

excellent professional development opportunity and energises the team's focus on the continuous improvement of teaching.

Improvement in teaching has made a positive difference to pupils' attainment and progress in lessons. Observations during the visit and the school's own lesson observations show that the majority of pupils are making good progress in their learning. Regular assessment of pupils' progress indicates that most are on track to achieve their individual targets. Results in national tests for Year 6 pupils have improved well since the last inspection. In 2009, attainment was above average in both English and mathematics and there was a significant increase in the proportion of pupils making expected progress in both subjects. Current teacher assessments show the school has maintained these gains. From 2007 to 2009, the proportion of Year 2 pupils attaining expected levels in their end of key stage assessments declined, with results significantly lower than that found nationally. As a consequence of actions taken to improve matters, the decline has been halted. Current teacher assessments show the gap between the school's results and the national average is narrowing, particularly in reading and writing.

Teachers' lesson planning has improved and a consistent whole-school approach has recently been developed. Pupils say that lessons are more interesting and 'fun'. This is because a significant amount of work has taken place to embed a more creative and skills-based curriculum. This is helping to develop pupils' independence and collaborative working and is enabling them to formulate and discuss their own ideas. Teaching assistants provide effective additional help to individuals and targeted groups; meticulous recording of the progress of pupils in their charge help teachers to assess the effectiveness of this support quickly. Teachers' use of assessment is developing and there are useful systems for recording pupils' progress against their targets. The school is aware that more needs to be done to make sure everyone uses this information to plan lessons that are always pitched at the needs of individual pupils, particularly the most able. All pupils' work is marked regularly. Pupils like the 'pride points' that come from successfully achieving their learning objectives and the opportunities to assess their own work and that of their peers.

The headteacher has worked tenaciously not only to raise standards and expectations across the school, but also to meld and develop successfully a harmonious primary school team from two very different previous schools. Since the inspection, she has provided a clear and strong direction and is well supported by the governing body and the recently extended leadership team. Through their work, including observations of teaching, book scrutiny, review information on pupils' progress and the cycle of meetings, senior leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Outcomes of such work inform the development of priorities in the school improvement plan.

The strengths seen at the time of the last inspection have been sustained or built upon. Strong pastoral support is successfully including all pupils into the life of the school. Pupils are polite, friendly and well behaved. They say they feel very safe and

enjoy school and are particularly appreciative of the exciting range of additional in-school, out-of-school and after-school activities which enrich the curriculum well. The school has invested heavily in making the outdoor areas for all pupils interesting and vibrant. This is particularly the case for the outdoor learning areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which are adding greatly to children's enjoyment, learning and progress. Such actions, better achievement and teaching, aided by more effective shared leadership, have increased the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

The school is outward looking and has benefited from effective support from the local authority, particularly in helping them to continue to develop the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school is fully involved in a local education improvement partnership, which provides additional opportunities for pupils to meet and work with others, as well as opportunities for teachers to share good practice, moderate assessments of pupils' work and gain local professional development opportunities.

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

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector