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Mrs Margaret Gregory
Headteacher
Devonshire Road Primary School
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Dear Mrs Gregory

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 April 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the representatives of the governing body and the pupils in Year 5 who gave up their time to talk to me about the school.

The context in which the school works has not altered substantially since the previous inspection. However, the school has had to manage many temporary staffing arrangements this year.

As a result of the inspection on 23–24 September 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve the leadership, management and governance of the school
- ensure that statutory requirements in respect of safeguarding are met
- improve the provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils
- raise the level of attendance of poor attenders by at least 5% by the end of the academic year
- improve the use of assessment in lessons and as a tool for managers to monitor and increase pupils' progress.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.



The school's own data indicate that attainment remains below average across all key stages. In all year groups standards are lower in writing than in the other core areas. Through tracking pupils' progress the school can demonstrate that there is a gradual, if uneven, increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the levels expected for their age. This is most evident in reading. Two main factors are contributing to this nascent improvement: the establishment of a system for the regular and frequent tracking of pupils' progress towards their targets and the increasing use of assessment information in planning and delivering lessons.

An accessible electronic tracking system has been introduced and the school has raised the number of times pupils' progress is assessed and evaluated during the year. The accuracy of assessments is improving, although the school acknowledges that more work is needed to secure this fully. Leaders are gradually increasing the rigour with which assessment information is interrogated to identify underachievement. Recently, plans to address the shortfalls in the learning of individual pupils have been formalised, with tighter timescales for review and a growing focus on the impact of interventions. This remains underdeveloped in relation to the performance of groups.

The school, with considerable support from the local authority, has focused on developing effective assessment for learning in the classroom. Observations indicate that this is beginning to pay dividends. Teachers are articulating the direction of learning and the purpose of activities in each topic. At times they draw effectively on pupils' previous learning. The frequent, well-managed use of 'talking partners' provides pupils with the chance to articulate their thinking, while at the end of lessons pupils are asked to explain what they have learned. The school has developed a series of prompts, displayed as acronyms, which are providing pupils with a range of ways to understand and talk about the process of their learning. Pupils are embracing these opportunities enthusiastically. However, not all work is well enough matched to the needs of all pupils so improvement in the impact of teaching on the rate of pupils' progress is inconsistent across the school.

More accurate assessment of the small stages in pupils' learning is resulting in improved guidance for pupils. The marking policy has been reviewed and a system that acknowledges pupils' successes and identifies their next steps in learning has been adopted, although not fully refined and embedded. A series of 'non-negotiables' has been established with regard to the presentation of pupils' work with evident benefits. The school has reviewed its approach to homework and developed a consistent format for this which pupils understand. When consulted, most parents and carers were positive about this although responses were not consistent across year groups. The school has recently initiated a forum intended to facilitate closer partnership with parents and carers.

There has been a marked rise in the overall rate of attendance this year compared with the similar period last year. The number of persistent absentees has reduced substantially. The need for good attendance has been made more explicit, for



instance through displays, assemblies, class trophies and certificates. The school, with good support from the local authority, has worked with families to reduce the level of persistent absence, taking tough measures when required.

Governors have ensured that statutory requirements in respect of safeguarding are met. The governing body has streamlined its operation and participated in training so that it is able to respond promptly when required and provide increasing levels of challenge to the school's leaders. Governors are receiving a broader range of information about the school's performance, enabling them to make a realistic evaluation of its position.

Senior leaders have been slow to initiate the changes required to bring about improvement. An initial lack of decisive direction resulted in uneven responses to training and the implementation of agreed strategies, as well as divergent approaches by leaders. However, the pace of change has picked up recently and leaders are more readily acknowledging the extent and urgency of the improvements required. Information derived from the tracking system is being used with increasing focus to identify issues and to hold staff to account. The rigour with which the effectiveness of actions taken is evaluated is improving, in part as a consequence of the school's and local authority's joint system for action planning and reporting.

The local authority's statement of action met requirements. The local authority has provided a very wide range of good-quality support for the school. The impact of this was limited for a period but it is beginning to bear fruit, for instance in the more effective use of assessment for learning. The School Improvement Partner, who is also a local authority officer, has provided robust challenge to the headteacher and been instrumental in increasing the pace of change.

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

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector