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Mrs Anne Stonell
Townsend Primary School
Townsend Street
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Dear Mrs Stonell

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 13 July 2010 and for the information you provided during my visit. Could you convey my thanks to the member of the governing body, the school improvement partner, staff and pupils I spoke to during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 2 to 3 December 2009, the school was asked to:

- Raise the attainment of all pupils, especially those currently in Years 4, 5 and 6, so that they attain at least average standards, under Ofsted criteria, by the summer of 2011 at the latest, through:
 - extending the recent improvements to the curriculum
 - improving further the quality of teaching and learning, making sure that in all lessons, the pace of learning is sufficiently rapid, information on how well each pupil is doing is used to match work closely to their needs, raising expectations further and by ensuring pupils are active learners, not having to sit and listen to teachers for too long.

- Continue to improve the leadership of the school by:
 - sustaining the school's rate of improvement through the forthcoming change of headteacher
 - developing the roles and impact of middle leaders, including subject leaders.

- Improve the provision in the Nursery and Reception classes by:
 - ensuring that assessments made of children feed clearly into the planning of their learning
 - improving the quality of the adults' interactions with children, so that these promote higher-order thinking and learning

- improving the outdoor learning environments, so that there is good free flow between classroom and outdoors, and the outdoor areas are well equipped and used in inclement weather.

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

Attainment is set to rise considerably in all core subjects in 2010. The school has made very good improvement to raising the attainment levels of pupils in Years 5 and 6. The school's data indicate that pupils are set to gain the expected levels of attainment in mathematics, although they may fall marginally short in English and science. This represents good improvement in the last year as pupils were assessed as being significantly below their targets in 2009. The school also predicts good improvement in the proportion of pupils set to gain high levels these subjects. In Years 2 and 3 pupils are also achieving their predicted target grades. Leaders and managers have used data effectively to not only determine the levels of performance of year groups but to identify more vulnerable pupils who are at risk of underachieving. This has enabled the school to implement good intervention support for individual pupils as well as concentrating their efforts on Year 4, who are not achieving as well as their peers in Key Stage 2.

Pupils said the school keeps them very safe and that teachers work hard to support them. Attendance is in line with national expectations and the pupils said they are praised for good attendance. Older pupils were enthusiastic about the opportunities to be peer mediators for younger pupils. They also welcomed the opportunity to run the school bank, which is a new business enterprise initiative.

In the majority of lessons, pupils made good progress in their learning. In all lessons, teachers clearly explained the learning objectives to the pupils. Pupils knew what was expected of them and teachers encouraged active learning. Some teachers used assessment data well to cluster groups of pupils with similar levels of ability. In some lessons, teachers assessed pupils' progress very well, which enabled them to alter the pace of the lesson. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, the pace of learning was fast and exciting and the variety of tasks given to pupils both challenged and stimulated them to produce very good work. Pupils assessing each other's work and pupil discussion were used extremely well. In a weaker lesson, the pace of learning slowed as the task proved to be too challenging for the pupils. In another lesson the teacher did not make an accurate assessment of pupils' progress effectively enough to move some pupils on quickly in their writing. The use of the method of assessing pupils' progress is now embedded in writing and is progressing in mathematics. This has contributed well to the predicted rise in pupils' attainment. Assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage is regular and is effectively shared with parents.

The school has built on the sound improvements made at the previous inspection to further develop the curriculum. In the school's drive to provide a meaningful and well-rounded, interesting curriculum, subjects have been linked together well. The school has developed mathematics and science weeks to deepen pupils' understanding of the core subjects. There are mathematics support sessions for parents which are very well attended. Drama has been used extensively in English to enable pupils to improve their creative-writing skills. Science has now moved towards single-year-group teaching to enable teachers to more sharply assess pupils' understanding. The school has plans to further improve the provision in modern foreign languages and music. The full impact of the new initiatives is yet to be realised.

The new headteacher assumed her post in January; the deputy headteacher joined the school in April. Under the headteacher's leadership the staff now share the vision of rapid improvement in all areas of the school's work. The headteacher has worked quickly to develop a cohesive and effective senior leadership team. Attainment is set to rise significantly in most years, teaching and assessment is improving and there is a developing curriculum. Good improvements have been made to the outdoor area for the Early Years Foundation Stage children. The well-devised sheltered play areas are suitably free flowing from classrooms. Classrooms have also been redesigned, enabling children to have access to themed play areas. There are further developments planned for September 2010. There are robust quality assurance systems in place to assess the performance of pupils by subject, which school leaders are using adequately. The school improvement plan is detailed and in the main robust in its analysis. Through effective data analysis leaders have a good understanding of how well groups of pupils are performing. However, the evaluation of the impact of some of the new initiatives is underdeveloped. Middle leaders and subject leaders contribute to school improvement well and undertake good monitoring of their assigned areas. From September, senior leaders will enable middle and subject leaders to have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities as they are not at present suitably defined.

The actions to improve teaching and learning have enabled leaders and managers to have an accurate view of the quality of provision in the school. The quality of teaching and learning is improving well. There have been whole-school activities to improve teachers' practice and sound analysis is being undertaken to identify weaknesses across the school. This has been supported well by the local authority. Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance, although appropriate training which will enable them to better scrutinise pupil performance has not yet been accessed.

The local authority school improvement partner has been very thorough in her analysis of the school's performance and provides a good level of support and effective challenge to school leaders. The previously acting headteacher who was in post at the time of inspection is providing effective and appropriate support to the headteacher.

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

Samantha Morgan-Price

Her Majesty's Inspector