

Suite 22
West Lancashire investment Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566934
Direct F 01695 729320
Email: gtunnicliffe@dfbt.com



19 November 2010

Mrs Hilda Blythe
Headteacher
Choppington First School
Eastgate
Choppington
Northumberland
NE62 5RR

Dear Mrs Blythe

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Choppington First School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 November 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also thank the teachers and pupils who gave up their time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection in April 2009 the Early Years Foundation Stage leader has left the school and a new leader has been appointed from September 2010. One teacher has been absent for nearly a term due to illness but has now returned. The school has a very mobile pupil population with 40% of pupils leaving or joining the school since the last inspection and the school roll has increased substantially from 70 to 90 pupils. There are now four classes catering for pupils, in the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit, Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4 and a mixed-age nurture class.

As a result of the inspection on 23 and 24 April 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.

The high pupil mobility in this school has hampered senior leaders' efforts to make improvements in some of the issues identified at the last inspection. Despite these barriers, staff are working as a close-knit team with renewed vigour and a shared determination to overcome them and improve the life chances of all pupils. The headteacher, who had been in post less than a week at the time of the last



inspection, has focused the work of the school on improving pupils' achievement and developing better links with parents and carers to raise their aspirations and engagement with the school.

The school has carried out extensive work on developing a new and exciting curriculum that better meets the needs of the pupils in this school and has the development of basic skills as its core. This new creative curriculum model is offering increased opportunities for pupils to make meaningful links between different subjects which give them new experiences and a context for their learning as well as more opportunities to practise their basic skills. A recent drive to improve reading across the school has been successful and more pupils are working at or above age-related expectations. There has also been an increase in the number of pupils who are reaching the higher levels in mathematics. This has been achieved through better lesson planning which closely matches learning activities to pupils' abilities. In a lesson observed for the older pupils, the teacher had structured the learning well for five groups of pupils of mixed ages and a wide range of abilities. There was an accurate match of activities to abilities and teaching assistants were well used to support and extend pupils' learning so as to make better progress throughout the lesson. Strategies to accelerate pupils' progress in writing have been less successful because the match between pupils' restricted knowledge of sounds and letters and the activities set in lessons is sometimes weak and limits the pace of learning.

Teaching assistants throughout the school have responded positively to the issues identified at the last inspection. They have attended professional development courses and five have upgraded their knowledge and understanding of English and mathematics by taking exams and attending night classes. As a consequence, during the visit, teaching assistants were observed working alongside pupils in small groups using assessment well to help pupils make better progress. They were fully involved in all parts of the lesson because they had been well prepared and are integral to teachers' planning.

The school has responded effectively to the increasing number of pupils who have joined the school with social emotional and behavioural difficulties. Teachers work very closely with parents and carers to try to involve them in the life of the school. A 'nurture class' has been established for 12 pupils from Years 2 to 4 who have the greatest need. Pupils in this class have their own curriculum which improves their social skills and behaviour alongside accelerating their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This innovative approach to tackling individual pupils' social and emotional needs has improved behaviour across the school and raised these pupils' self-esteem and aspirations. Pupils say that they enjoy being in this class and that it has helped them to improve their learning. They especially enjoy the shared daily breakfast and socialising opportunities.

The school has had less success in raising the overall attendance and punctuality of pupils. The inclusion mentor identifies individuals who are persistent absentees and their families and works closely with them, developing strategies to improve their

attendance. These include attendance at the free Wednesday breakfast club; first day response calls; home visits; and developing an attendance forum of pupils who call themselves the 'A Team' and act as ambassadors for attendance across the school. Weekly class attendance rewards and 'cookie Friday' are appreciated by parents and pupils. However, despite some striking examples of improved attendance by a number of persistent absentee families, overall attendance remains low.

Senior leaders have had some success in developing the governing body with a new experienced chair and three parent governor appointments, who are the first parents on the governing body for a number of years. This close working with local families and the community is helping the school to raise pupils' aspirations and involve more parents and carers in the life of the school. The governors visit the school regularly and carry out monitoring activities alongside the headteacher. All teachers now have subject responsibilities and are developing their roles as subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. However, this is in the early stages and there are plans in place to develop these roles further through sharing good practice, working closely with other local schools and observing teaching and learning in classrooms. The new procedures to track pupils' progress termly using accurate assessment are now embedded across the school and these data are being used effectively by all staff to identify and tackle underachievement and implement catch-up programmes for individuals and groups. There are regular moderation meetings within the school and the local authority and local partnership of schools have brokered cross-school moderation which ensures that teachers are correctly assessing pupils' progress and identifying the next steps in their learning.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2009

- Maximise opportunities in all subjects to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Ensure that the support provided by teaching assistants is of consistently high quality across all aspects of lessons to improve pupils' progress, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Improve rates of attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure that all levels of management are more fully involved in the process of self-evaluation.