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24 March 2011

Miss J Sheard
Headteacher
Walkley Primary School
Burnaby Crescent
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S6 2RZ

Dear Miss Sheard,

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Walkley Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 23 March 2011, for the time you gave to our pre-inspection discussions and for the evidence that you provided me with during my visit. Would you pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and the group of pupils with whom I spoke.

Since the last inspection, the school has appointed two newly-qualified teachers who started work in September 2010. There is also a new special educational needs coordinator who took up the post in January 2011. The school is receiving increasing numbers of pupils at the very early stages of acquiring English.

As a result of the inspection on 21 and 22 July 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. After a slow start the momentum has increased and the school is making headway in tackling each of the identified issues.

In 2010, pupils' skills, dispositions and achievements were broadly satisfactory when set against their starting points. However, pupils' attainments in English and in writing in particular were weaker. Action taken to raise attainment further includes: specialist one-to-one tuition and targeted booster classes for pupils; enhanced coaching and mentoring for staff; and refinement of target setting, and review and monitoring procedures are all having an impact. While there remains some inconsistency, the school's latest tracking data indicate that more pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language and those known to be eligible for free school meals, are making more-effective progress. This is starting to close the gaps that have opened up between their current and expected attainments, particularly in writing. A series of joint visits to every class in the school with

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senior leaders confirm this improving picture. The school's leaders know that a final surge in progress is needed if Year 2 and Year 6 pupils are to reach their end-of-key-stage targets.

Pupils' attendance during the autumn term was 92.25%, which was low but was heavily influenced by illness and pupils' absence through religious observance. Since that time it has averaged 95% which is the school target. Moreover, rates of persistent absence have fallen markedly. This is due to the more-rigorous, effective and proactive strategies employed by the school to improve attendance, including raising awareness among parents and carers of the damage regular absence and extended term-time holidays can have on their children's education. A high-profile campaign to promote good attendance and crown the class with the best attendance is popular and has become a coveted accolade to receive.

The school presents itself as a harmonious, caring and inclusive environment with happy children and supportive and committed staff. These qualities, together with strong staff-pupil relationships, and key actions taken, such as the more-effective deployment of teaching assistants and targeted mentoring and coaching of staff, are beginning to iron-out the inconsistencies that existed in the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. The enhanced focus on giving pupils the chance to acquire, develop and apply their oral and writing skills across the creative curriculum that is now established has been particularly fruitful in increasing the presentation, quality and volume of pupils' work.

Senior leaders have used their strategic and insightful thinking to drive improvement purposefully. They are using regular and robust monitoring evaluation to assess the impact of actions taken and to refine their approach accordingly. Leaders' increasing efficiency is reflected in the local authority decision to withdraw gradually the intensive support it has been providing. A more sharply focused committee structure, enhanced training and the improved deployment of their skills and experiences mean that members of the governing body are better placed to ensure all their statutory duties are met and that they rigorously challenge as well as support the school to improve. Procedures for dealing with exclusions are now in line with best practice recommendations.

The local authority statement of action meets requirements. It offers a useful framework for systematically providing targeted support, advice and training, as well as sign-posting the school's journey towards tackling the identified shortcomings with clear measureable success criteria. The work of the School Improvement Partner, who also acted in her capacity as a lead headteacher for the school, has been influential in an advisory capacity and as a critical friend. A recent local authority review of the school's progress in addressing the key issues concluded satisfactory progress was being made.

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
Mr John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 21-22 July 2010

- Ensure that the governing body meets its statutory duties in dealing with exclusions.

- Further raise attainment in English by improving:
 - pupils' spoken language skills
 - the content of pupils' written work and the speed at which they write
 - the use of a consistent handwriting style.

- Ensure consistently good teaching by:
 - improving the deployment of teaching assistants
 - using assessment information more rigorously to plan work which challenges all pupils and enables them to make good progress.

- Raise levels of attendance by devising and implementing strategies to reduce the number of holidays taken during term time.