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10 July 2007

Mr S Hughes  
Headteacher  
Castleway Primary School  
Castleway North  
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CH46 1RN

Dear Mr Hughes

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Castleway Primary School

### Introduction

Following my visit with Stephen Wall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 July 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### Evidence

Inspectors visited lessons in each class, observed a range of small-group support sessions, examined documents and observed pupils' conduct around the school and at break times. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, key staff and groups of pupils. Discussions were also held with the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

There have been no staffing changes since the last monitoring visit. The school was recently part of a review of primary school places, undertaken by the LA. This focused on a possible amalgamation with a nearby primary school or the school's closure from September 2008. It was decided that the school will remain open and will be subject to further review in two years' time. The process and the uncertainty

stemming from this proved stressful for the whole school community. However, staff, governors, pupils and parents are pleased with the outcome.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement is improving at Key Stage 2, and the good achievement in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, noted at the time of the inspection in May 2006, has been sustained. Children continue to make good progress from starting points well below those expected for their age when they enter Reception. This good start is built on effectively through Key Stage 1, with some pupils in Year 2 making particularly good gains in mathematics and reading. Progress in writing is slower. Early indications of the 2007 test results for pupils in the current Year 2 class are that fewer pupils have reached Level 2, the basic standard expected for seven-year-olds, than in 2006. This is largely because of the higher proportion of pupils in the class with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). However, there has been a significant increase in the numbers achieving the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics. In addition, the proportion of children achieving at the higher end of Level 2 has significantly increased. Writing is the weakest area, with no pupils reaching Level 3. Most pupils with LDD, although not reaching nationally expected levels, made good progress in relation to their abilities.

Early indications of results in the 2007 tests for Year 6 pupils show a slight rise in those for mathematics and science, when compared to 2006. English results were disappointing; they were lower than those in 2006. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4, the standard expected for 11-year-olds, rose. This indicates that the measures to support and challenge pupils were successful. In science, a higher proportion reached Level 4 and the higher Level 5. The school attributes this to improved teaching and the increased focus on learning through investigation. Results in reading improved significantly and were the highest the school has achieved; over a third of the class reached Level 5. However, writing results fell, with far fewer pupils reaching both Level 4 and Level 5 than in reading. It is clear from the work of the current Year 6 pupils and the school's now robust assessments that these pupils have made up a significant amount of lost ground this year. There is a similar picture in Year 5, where most pupils have made satisfactory progress in science and mathematics and good progress in reading, but writing lags behind. In Years 3 and 4, progress is patchier, with some areas of underachievement still to be tackled. The school has made good use of its data on pupils to pinpoint particular areas of weakness. For example, it has been identified that progress stalls in Year 3. The school is in the process of devising strategies to combat this issue. Writing continues to be a major focus for improvement. Staff are more confident and accurate in their assessments of where pupils are up to in writing and what their next steps should be. Further staff training and the implementation of 'The Big Write' project are planned for early next term.

The progress of lower-attaining pupils in Key stage 2 is picking up. It was at least satisfactory in the sessions seen and occasionally good. This is because the school is

successfully tackling the issues identified at the last visit, and has improved the quality of provision and support for these pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 – satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development continues to be a strength. Pupils develop into mature, thoughtful individuals because, from the earliest stages in Reception, a high emphasis is placed on this area. Key Stage 2 pupils in particular report that lessons continue to be more interesting and challenging for them and that this has increased their enjoyment of school. This has helped improve attendance, which has risen from below average last year to slightly above average. Behaviour is good overall, but there are still times when teaching fails to engage and motivate all pupils. A small number then become restless and they chatter, which slows their progress.

### Quality of provision

Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning noted at the last visit have been sustained. Aspects of good practice evident throughout the school include: thorough planning; good use of time at the start and end of each lesson to set the agenda and to check on learning; and good opportunities for practical learning. Improvements were also seen in the level of challenge provided for pupils of different abilities, throughout each part of the lesson. Overall, teachers have a much better knowledge and understanding of the progress their pupils are making and use this appropriately to plan the next learning steps. Their higher expectations of pupils are evident in the vastly improved standards of handwriting and presentation. These are key factors in pupils' improving progress and have been brought about through more rigorous monitoring, as well as staff training. The support for pupils of lower ability, in class and in small groups, is rapidly improving; it is considerably more focused. As a result, these pupils are building more successfully on previous learning.

There are still some inconsistencies in teaching, particularly at Key Stage 2. Occasionally, activities are lacklustre and fail to engage and motivate all pupils. Sometimes, the point of the lesson is missed because pupils do not have the skills to carry out the tasks given to them. This happens when previous learning is not taken sufficiently into account. In these lessons, the pace dips and progress slows because some pupils become disengaged and fail to concentrate. Sometimes, younger pupils in Key Stage 2 would benefit from extra adult support to ensure that help is at hand when they need it. Marking of pupils' work is sharply focused on improvement and linked to targets in a few classes, but this is still not a consistent picture throughout the school.

There is some outstanding practice in the teaching of information and communication technology. Some innovative practice in the teaching of writing is just starting to emerge. However, not enough opportunities have been taken as yet to share this more widely throughout the school.

The curriculum and care, guidance and support are showing signs of improvement. The provision in mathematics and science has started to improve, with the introduction of more practical, investigative approaches to learning. The writing curriculum is at the start of a major overhaul, but it is much too early to see the impact of this on standards and achievement. Academic support and guidance continue to improve as staff and governors become more adept at evaluating data and taking appropriate action. There is room to improve the transition arrangements for pupils moving from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 to ensure that they are fully supported and that their previous learning is built on progressively.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Ensure the quality of teaching, pace of learning and expectations of what children in Key Stage 2 can achieve are consistently good enough to ensure children perform at their best – satisfactory

#### Leadership and management

The headteacher has successfully led the school through a challenging period, in which its future was in the balance. With the effective support of the deputy headteacher and the governors, he has ensured that staff morale has remained high and that the focus on raising standards has been maintained. In achieving this, he has taken a large share of the burden on himself and has not always delegated as many of the leadership and management tasks as effectively as he might. However, the hard work and commitment of all within the school community, underpinned by high quality support from LA officers, have ensured that the school has a sound basis on which to build for the future. The school continues to develop and refine its systems for checking on all aspects of its work. To this end, senior managers have sharpened up the improvement plans which guide development. These identify more clearly how improvements will be brought about and how actions will raise standards. The improvement plan is a much more useful document against which the school can judge its progress.

Great strides have been made in improving the provision for pupils of lower ability. The school has a clear overview of the support for these pupils and the progress they are making. Much of this work has been undertaken by the coordinator for special educational needs, with the support of the LA and the deputy headteacher. There remains a need for regular monitoring of the quality of the support provided and of the progress made, to ensure consistency. The coordinators for English, mathematics and science have consolidated the areas of improvement noted at the last visit. Their expertise in analysing, evaluating and using data to drive up

standards continues to develop. This, coupled with their analysis of pupils' work throughout the school, is giving them a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their areas. They are able to identify appropriate priorities for improvement. As yet, however, their experience of observing lessons in order to improve the quality and consistency of teaching is more limited. Consequently, they do not always have a secure enough knowledge, for example, of how effectively new initiatives are being implemented or improvements are being sustained across the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school and develop rigorous systems of self-evaluation – satisfactory

#### External support

The LA provides high quality support to the school through the work of the school's contact officer and various consultants. A good balance is achieved between support provided in response to the school's request and that suggested by the LA. This balance is changing as the school demonstrates increasing capacity to set its own agenda. The LA support is highly valued by the school.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

#### Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for improvement remain those identified at the time of the inspection in May 2006.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Traves  
Additional Inspector