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Mr D. Curley  
Acting Headteacher  
Northlands Junior School  
Winifred Road  
Pitsea  
Basildon  
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Dear Mr Curley

### Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the warm welcome I received when I inspected your school on 10 July 2007. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff, governors and local authority representatives for the help they gave me. I understand that you have only recently taken over as acting headteacher, following the early retirement of your predecessor, so I would particularly like to thank you for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information that you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 14-15 December 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement in English, Mathematics and science, by ensuring that assessment information is used effectively to meet pupils' needs and that marking helps them know what they should do to improve
- use more regular and effective monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that teaching is consistently good and challenges all pupils, particularly the most able
- review the allocation and use of teaching time in line with the government's guidelines.

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' achievements.

Provisional results from the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 6 show a significant improvement in pupils' standards and achievement in mathematics and science. In English, pupils' reading improved but their test results in writing were below the school's expectations. Standards and achievement have also improved for other pupils, particularly in writing, mathematics and science in Years 4 and 5.

At the time of the last inspection, the school had recently introduced an initiative known as the intensive support programme, but teachers were still getting used to the detailed assessment required. The programme has helped teachers to make better use of assessment information to plan work that meets pupils' needs. Changes in the style of marking mean that pupils are clearer about what they need to do to improve, and this is helping to raise standards. Across the whole school, the percentage of pupils who are working at or above the level expected for their age has increased: from 66% to 71% in reading; 43% to 64% in writing; 56% to 79% in mathematics; and from 58% to 84% in science. The school recognises that further efforts are needed to improve writing.

The new inclusion manager has introduced systems to monitor the progress of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, and made sure that each has an appropriate individual education plan (IEP). The school is finding it difficult to engage some parents in designing and reviewing IEPs, and is sensibly planning to look at good practice in other schools.

The additional non-teaching time provided for coordinators of core subjects has enabled them to undertake work scrutiny and to provide subject leadership that supports colleagues. The programme of lesson observations by senior leaders has helped improve teaching and learning. The joint observation undertaken during the inspection confirmed the accuracy of the school's evaluation of teaching and learning. Observation records for the last two years show an improving trend in the quality of teaching and learning. This is because teachers, including the four newly qualified teachers, have had effective guidance in how to improve their skills. The majority of lessons observed during the inspection were good and none was unsatisfactory.

As you are aware, there is still scope for further improvement. Able students are not always given appropriately challenging work that might help them reach level 5 by the end of Year 6. Although marking is better, teachers do not consistently check that pupils take note of their guidance. The school's self evaluation gives too much emphasis to description and not enough to evaluation. Parts of it are out of date, but it has been improved by the recent analysis of achievement and standards undertaken by core subject coordinators and by the revised section on leadership and management.

The last inspection found that curriculum time was below recommended levels. The extra time that has been taken from the lunch break has not quite been enough, but the school has made reasonable interim arrangements while the necessary notice is given for lengthening the school day.

HMI had previously examined the local authority's statement of action and had indicated that improvements were needed. To some extent, the revised plan has been overtaken by events, but it is now satisfactory. Support from the school

development adviser and other local authority consultants has been good. The governors have been supported well by the local authority in carrying out their duties.

Although some senior staff and other teachers are leaving at the end of the academic year, the school will be fully staffed in September. The senior leadership team, the governors and the local authority have made effective arrangements to ensure continuity. This includes the appointment of an experienced interim headteacher and deputy head.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott  
Her Majesty's Inspector