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2 November 2007

Miss Jenny Haunch
Headteacher
Little Digmoor Primary School
Abbeystead
Skelmersdale
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WN8 9NF

Dear Miss Haunch

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I also appreciated the opportunity to meet with two governors and your School Improvement Partner (SIP). Please extend my thanks to the pupils, several of whom I spoke with at lunchtime and in classrooms.

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.

As a result of the inspection in May 2006, the school was asked to

- Raise standards in English throughout the school.
- Ensure that teachers use assessment information more consistently to plan lessons that promote good achievement.

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.

Since the May 2006 inspection, the school has achieved Extended Schools status, Active Mark award and Lancashire Healthy Schools Beacon status, including a quality mark certificate in teaching & learning. New Foundation Stage facilities came into use in September 2006, including a separate room for the nursery, shared kitchen and activity areas and a covering to the outdoor play section. There has been an increase in the proportion of pupils who are learning English as an additional language, now around 10% of the numbers on roll. The majority of these pupils are of Eastern European heritage and seven are in the early stages of learning English.

The majority of children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are well below those typical of their age group. Standards of attainment by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 remain well below average overall, although performance is generally better in mathematics than in English.

The unvalidated test results for Key Stage 2 in 2007 were below the national average in mathematics and well below in English. This represented satisfactory progress for those pupils. Although the school does not yet appear to be showing a clear upward trend in improvement, this is affected by fluctuations from year to year due to cohort size and the effects of pupil mobility. School records show that the number of pupils leaving or entering the school at other than the usual times, particularly in Key Stage 2, is higher than average.

Improvements in the school's provision over the last 18 months, and particularly in leadership and management, have led to it being removed from the local authority's (LA) list of schools with serious educational weaknesses. A whole-school commitment to the intensifying support programme (ISP), with effective support by LA consultants and the school's improvement partner, is beginning to pay dividends. Staff have a clearer understanding of their shared responsibility for raising standards through rigorous assessment, tracking pupil progress and setting targets. Teaching assistants contribute to intervention programmes for those pupils who require extra support. Teachers' lesson planning has improved in usefulness and consistency, and is taking more account of information gained from assessment and tracking. There are now clear links made between performance management systems and whole-school target setting.

With evidence of steady progress in writing as a result of a strong focus on this aspect of pupils' work, the school is aware of the need to accelerate pupils' progress in improving their reading skills, which are particularly weak. Following the success of initiatives to improve boys' achievement, they are now outperforming girls and actions are being put into place to redress the balance, especially as some year groups have a particularly high proportion of boys.

The headteacher's focused and enthusiastic approach has led to a more distributed leadership, in which the skills of senior and subject leaders are developing effectively. This has been illustrated in the involvement of English and mathematics leaders in writing and monitoring action plans as part of the ISP.

The school is committed to further developing its place at the centre of the community, for the benefit of children and their families. As a result of the headteacher's and governors efforts to maintain and improve available facilities on the school site, a variety of learning and physical activities are available for all members of the community. There are now 14 community groups using the FOLD centre, and this was instrumental in the awarding of Extended School status.

A number of new governors have been appointed since the last inspection, and the governing body has a wider range of expertise to draw on. Governors are well informed and involved, have an appropriately revised committee structure and better awareness of monitoring and evaluation systems. The previous budget under-spend

has been allocated to make some improvements to the physical environment of the school, including a separate nursery classroom, and to maintaining a favourable ratio of staff to pupils. Governors understand the need to monitor the impact of the school's actions on raising attainment, and that more rapid improvement in English is a high priority.

Although good progress has been made in developing the improved planning and assessment systems, its full impact is not yet being seen in consistently good teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress. The school is aware of this, and recently arranged a training day which focused on improving the use of assessment for learning. Some inconsistency in the quality of teachers' marking also led to a policy review and improvements being made.

The headteacher has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. However, the school's self-evaluation, whilst generally accurate, concentrates more on describing what the school provides than on clear evidence of the impact of this provision on improving outcomes for pupils. The school's analysis of pupils' attainment and progress shows inconsistency in understanding of the difference between the two. The headteacher is aware of this and there are plans to update and improve the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning to ensure a clear and succinct focus on the most important priorities and measurable success criteria.

Since the last inspection, determined efforts to improve attendance, with the help of the skilled learning mentor, have resulted in attendance levels now reaching the national average. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around school are mostly good. This is supported by very good relationships between adults and pupils, and the use of effective and positive strategies for managing behaviour. Good staff morale and a caring ethos are evident in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. McCloy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' and 'y'.

Marguerite McCloy HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector