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Mrs Joan Grant
Sandilands Primary School
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Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Dear Mrs Grant

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 November 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. I conducted formal lesson observations in seven classes and briefly visited four other classes. I scrutinised evidence provided by the school and looked at documents such as the single central record of staff and volunteers, monitoring records and some pupils' work in books and on display.

Since the previous inspection a new, experienced deputy headteacher started working at the school in addition to a teacher, funded for a year by Manchester Challenge. Approximately 30 pupils left the school other than at the end of Year 6, many moving to a neighbouring local authority. The school was successful in applying for substantial funding to increase the number and quality of computers within school. The ratio of pupil to computer is now 6:1.

As a result of the inspection on 24 –25 March 2009, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement, particularly in writing, information and communication technology (ICT) and for more able pupils
- improve the curriculum so that it matches the interests and abilities of all pupils, builds on their knowledge and skills and provides a balance in subjects
- ensure lessons are sufficiently challenging and engaging
- ensure that pupils understand how they are doing in their work and what they need to do in order to improve it.



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 pupils' achievement.

Teaching in over half of the lessons observed during the inspection was good or better. Pupils' improved attendance coupled with their good behaviour, good manners and politeness assist their progress. They are responsive to teachers' questioning, are actively involved in lessons and in shaping the curriculum and are keen to learn. In some lessons pupils gave constructive help to each other in how to improve their own and others' work. Teachers effectively modelled expectations of pupils' work using ICT and showed pupils in a supportive way how their work could be improved. Teachers refer to pupils' targets and what they have to work on next in almost all lessons and this enables pupils to know what they need to do to improve further. In a few lessons talking partners were used well to consolidate pupils' speaking and listening skills and to consolidate learning by getting pupils to explain, think and to give reasons for their methods. In most lessons pupils were engaged and more able pupils were challenged because the activities were relevant, purposeful and enabled them to use and improve their skills. In all lessons observed, ICT was used to enhance pupils' learning and knowledge. This significant improvement in teaching and learning is as a result of good support and guidance from senior leaders and the local authority. In addition, teachers have benefited from courses at a local primary school designed to move good teaching up to outstanding. Teachers have made good use of opportunities to work alongside each other and to share ideas and have made good use of whole-school training, and regular developmental monitoring by school leaders and the local authority. There is still some way to go to ensure learning is accelerated to improve pupils' achievement further, particularly in writing and mathematics to eradicate pupils' prior weaknesses in their learning and to ensure pupils' progress is good in more lessons.

In 2009, the progress Year 6 pupils made in Key Stage 2 was good in English and satisfactory in mathematics and science. Results of national assessments at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in September 2009, along with the school's most recent assessment data indicate standards have improved. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading and writing has risen in each of the last four years. Although it is still below average, it is no longer significantly below. The school has been successful in narrowing the gap between pupils' attainment and that expected nationally, especially in mathematics in which Year 2 pupils attained similarly to pupils nationally. At the end of Key Stage 2, attainment in English was around the national average in 2009 with almost three quarters of pupils attaining the expected Level 4. This was a significant increase from 2008. In mathematics and writing, although attainment increased in 2009, it remained well below the national average. Throughout the school, although more pupils are on track to reach the expected level for their age, improvement is still needed. Senior leaders have already focused their efforts to improve pupils' writing skills and to increase their attainment in mathematics.

There is greater balance between subjects in the curriculum, more connections between different subjects and an increased focus on ICT and speaking and listening skills. This is helping to ensure the curriculum meets pupils' needs. A key question links subjects together which challenges, particularly the more able, to follow up lines of discussion. In Year 4, for example, the key question for the topic is 'were the ancient Egyptians civilised?' In Year 2, the autumn topic started with the question 'Can we improve our environment?' These questions and topics enable pupils to research, discuss, hypothesise and to justify and present their opinions. The significant increase in computers has enabled the school to ensure the curriculum meets pupils' future needs as they grow older. Although pupils' basic typing skills are underdeveloped, pupils are able to create and design pictures, combine graphics and text and research at an adequate level.

The local authority is contributing to school improvement through a well-designed programme of support. This has led to increased rigour and accuracy in the school's monitoring of teaching and learning. The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. Comprehensive reviews have been undertaken and practical help has been provided to increase some pupils' progress in key subject areas, particularly reading. The support from other schools, the School Improvement Partner and Manchester Challenge Advisers has helped the school to raise achievement and to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector

