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4 November 2010

Miss G Gilbert
Sutton CofE VC Primary School
The Brook
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Dear Miss Gilbert

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Sutton CofE VC Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 3 November 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 19 March 2010, the school was asked to address the areas for improvement set out in the annex to this letter. These included accelerating the rate of pupils' progress in writing and science, improving the use of assessment information and strengthening the drive for school improvement.

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.

The school identified the improvement of pupils' writing as a priority in 2009/10 and used the 'talk for writing' approach to improve pupils' planning and composition. In 2010, the provisional results for Year 6 pupils in national tests indicate that writing improved on previous years and is now above average, as is English. Pupils' attainment in mathematics remained broadly average. Teacher assessments in science indicate an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 but the proportion achieving Level 5 remains below the average. Provisional results for Year 2 pupils in 2010 improved markedly, especially in writing, and attainment in most subjects is now above average. Early information on pupils' progress from Year 2 to Year 6 indicates a distinct improvement on 2009 to above the level expected nationally. The school's assessment information for other year groups records a similar trend of improvement although pupils' progress is not yet consistent across all years.

Senior staff have taken effective steps to improve teaching. There is greater collaboration between teachers in planning lessons and a stronger focus on matching work to pupils' individual needs and capabilities. However, this is not yet consistent across the school. The headteacher's evaluation of teaching, supported by the local authority, indicates that all teaching is satisfactory and that over half is regularly good. This means that the school is on track to achieve the target set in the local authority's statement of action.

The lessons observed showed that teachers engage pupils' interest, especially when activities are practical, for example in science. Teachers use paired talk regularly but with varying effect, sometimes giving insufficient time or not encouraging real discussion. Teaching assistants provide effective support to individuals and small groups but teachers often miss opportunities to set higher expectations for the more able pupils. The scheme of work for science has been updated with a strong focus on scientific investigation. Pupils report that science lessons are more enjoyable and that they learn more effectively as a result.

Teachers' use of assessment has improved. There is now a clear policy for marking and commenting on pupils' work which pupils understand and find helpful. Pupils know their targets, including those newly provided in science. The revised system for assessing pupils and recording their progress allows analysis of the performance of groups and identification of pupils for intervention. Subject leaders are beginning to use this information to evaluate performance. Assessment systems are established but their effectiveness still varies with the skill and understanding of teachers.

The headteacher and senior staff have reacted constructively and with determination to the issues raised by the inspection. There are clear action plans which are kept under review regularly. Members of the senior team have a common understanding of the vision and priorities for the school. They have developed a rigorous timetable for monitoring performance and evaluating progress which is linked to the school's targets. Subject leaders have a good understanding of their roles and work well together. They have improved subject action plans and are developing confidence in their review of performance.

The governing body understands the importance of its role in holding the school to account. It is developing systems to review the school's work and its members are receiving training from the local authority. They intend to make regular visits to the school and to scrutinise reports from staff. At the time of the visit, basic procedures for safeguarding children were in place.

The local authority statement of action has been amended and meets requirements. Consultants and inspectors have provided effective support and training. Subject leaders value the advice and joint working with consultants and this has been particularly helpful in science. The partnership with a local school enables the headteacher and teachers to discuss effective practice and to see it in action.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Accelerate the rate of pupils' progress in both writing and science, by:
 - setting and regularly reviewing targets for the progress made by pupils in each class
 - identifying and developing a whole-school approach for addressing the key areas of difficulty for pupils in these subjects
 - improving teachers' skills in teaching these subjects.
- Improve the use of assessment information, in Years 1 to 6, by:
 - establishing a system that tracks pupils' progress in science
 - using this tracking information to provide the right level of challenge in all lessons, for all learners, especially the more able
 - making more use of targets for pupils so that they know where they are in their learning and what they need to do to improve.
- Strengthen the drive for school improvement, by:
 - making the use of pupils' progress data the key measure that informs all monitoring work
 - making improvement to pupils' academic outcomes a higher priority in the monitoring work of the governing body
 - ensuring the governing body and senior staff tackle weaknesses in the teaching and better manage staff changes.