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Ms Karen Riddell
The Acting Headteacher
Northbourne CofE Primary School
Coldharbour Lane
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Deal
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Dear Ms Riddell

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Northbourne CofE Primary School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 13 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the local authority officers who also gave time to talk with me.

Since the last inspection, staff turnover has been exceptionally high and the number of pupils on roll has fallen, resulting in changes to class structure and organisation. Important relationships broke down which governors found impossible to resolve. Delegated powers were removed from the governing body and the local authority is in the process of establishing an interim executive board. The previous headteacher did not return to her duties after the summer term and left the school at the end of September.

As a result of the inspection on 10 December 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Staff and parents comment on the dramatic change in atmosphere and relationships since the beginning of this term saying that the school is beginning to recover from a very difficult few years. However, these changes are very recent and, although there are some positive signs, the school still has a long way to go.

Pupils' attainment and progress in the end of Key Stage 2 tests in the year following the inspection were exceptionally low. Marked improvements last year meant that most pupils made at least satisfactory progress overall and good progress in mathematics. Writing, however, continues to be a weakness and, whereas more than half achieved at the higher Level 5 in mathematics, no pupils achieved this in writing. The school's in-house tracking of attainment highlights inconsistencies between classes. Although most pupils made satisfactory or better progress during last year which helped them catch up from very low starting points, the progress of pupils in particular classes continued to be inadequate. Across the school, attainment and progress in writing remain weaker than in reading and mathematics.

Teachers are using increasingly interesting and varied approaches to encourage writing. However, these approaches are relatively new and the focus in lessons is often too much on what the adults will be doing rather than the pupils. Opportunities are missed for pupils to develop their speaking, listening and thinking skills and to produce work that is sustained and independent. Most of the learning seen during the visit was, at best, satisfactory and, in a small number of lessons, learning and progress were inadequate.

Well-focused support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those pupils are making at least satisfactory and often good progress. However, although most teachers plan lessons with activities to match the needs of different ability groups, the work in lessons and in pupils' books indicates that levels of challenge remain too low as do expectations about the quality and quantity of written work that pupils should be achieving.

The acting headteacher and special needs coordinator have worked well to rebuild the school team and improve motivation and enjoyment. Staff development activities and curriculum changes have been implemented to try to improve the quality of teaching, learning and, in particular, pupils' writing. However, current monitoring and evaluation are not sharply enough focused on pupils' achievements to pinpoint what needs to be done to achieve rapid and sustained improvement. Instability in staffing and leadership difficulties, including the lack of an effective governing body, have hindered the forward momentum of the school and the uncertainty around leadership remains.

The local authority has provided a great deal of support. However, due to the past difficulties, the impact of this has been diluted. Recent decisive actions have resulted in major changes and plans are in place to strengthen governance and leadership.

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

Sheena MacDonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2008.

- Build on pupils' writing skills, especially their spelling, punctuation, use of vocabulary and presentation of their work.
- Use the good teaching already evident in the school to make sure all lessons are taught well to help pupils catch up on previous gaps in their learning.
- Set work in lessons that challenges and extends more able pupils.