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Mrs Brenda Bland
Headteacher
Birchwood C of E Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bland

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Birchwood C of E Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff 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. I am also grateful to the pupils and members of the governing body who spoke with me as well as your School Improvement Partner.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 January 2009, 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 good progress in both making improvements and in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

There are signs of improvement in pupils' achievement, particularly so for boys. Overall, the unvalidated end of Key Stages 1 and 2 assessments for 2010 show an improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Levels 2B and 4 respectively. The proportion of boys attaining a Level 4 in English rose from 61% in 2009, to nearly 65% in 2010. This is because boys are now much more engaged in their learning, especially so in writing. Leaders have sought ways in which to interest boys, for example, by involving more dads in school life and providing opportunities for the pupils to observe male role models. In addition, staff have made better and more timely use of information about what pupils can and cannot do and have reviewed the curriculum to make the links between subjects clearer. They have, for example, identified writing opportunities in science and religious education. The results are that in nearly all the lessons observed, pupils were engaged in their learning and all pupils spoken with reported how much they enjoyed school.

September 2010



School leaders have also refocused teachers' planning so that, in most cases, it makes clear what different groups of pupils are to do and learn. This results in increasingly well-focused teaching which more and more meets the needs of learners well and offers greater challenge to pupils who are more able. In an outstanding English lesson in a mixed Year 4 and 5 class, for example, the teacher successfully challenged all pupils to review a poem about the wind and explain why and how the author had used a different number of syllables in each line to create effect. She then had different groups of pupils recreating poems using tongue twisters, musical instruments or, for the more able, parody. All pupils, boys and girls equally, enthused! Nevertheless, while teachers' planning demonstrates the commitment to providing challenge to all, including the more able, some teachers occasionally do not make clear what the different groups are to learn. Leaders recognise there needs to be a stronger level of consistency here.

Leaders also appreciate that their clear plans for improvement do not always articulate sharply enough what are the intended outcomes for pupils as a result of their actions. Making these outcomes sharper would enhance the school's growing understanding based on their improved use of assessment information that whole-school targets for improvement work best when they are continually broken down into key stage, class, group and individual pupil targets. It is partly these inconsistencies that are preventing more pupils from reaching the higher Levels 3 and 5 at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 respectively. It is also partly as a result of the leaders' focus, which was appropriate at the time, on ensuring that a minimum of the expected Levels 2 and 4 respectively were attained. Staff and governors know the time is right to challenge pupils even more.

At the time of the January 2009 inspection, not all staff in school were aware of how to make the most effective use of assessment information and whole-school self-evaluation. This has improved so that teachers now have a better understanding of what pupils in their classes can do and where gaps in their learning are before they take on the class in September. Planning scrutinised during this monitoring inspection, even when taking into account the inconsistencies raised earlier, has regard for this information. In addition, leaders have successfully widened staff participation in self-evaluation. The focus in recent years has been on improving achievement in English and mathematics. While this has been appropriate, more recently leaders of physical education and modern foreign languages have been able to check pupils' work and teachers' planning. An example of this has been to identify opportunities to support a number of pupils who are gifted and talented in sport.'

The strong and determined leadership of the headteacher, aided by her increasingly analytical senior leadership team, has ensured that, throughout the school, there is a shared understanding of what needs to be done. The governing body shares this awareness too. This improvement has also been enhanced by the clear, accurate and helpful reports provided by the School Improvement Partner.

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

Mark Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2009

- Improve the standards of writing reached by boys.
- Enhance the quality of teaching and that of the curriculum so that they better meet the needs of boys and of more-able pupils.
- Ensure all staff in school are fully aware of how to make the most effective use of assessment information, and whole-school self-evaluation.