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Mrs Hiscock
Headteacher
Conifers Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hiscock

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Conifers Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 November 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 staff, pupils and governors for their help. I would like to thank the School Improvement Partner for coming into school to meet me.

Since the inspection, changes to the structure of the leadership team have included the recent appointment of a non-teaching deputy headteacher.

As a result of the inspection on 2 and 3 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The legacy of underachievement in writing has been securely turned around and there is an improving trend. In the most recent school tests for 2010, pupil attainment at the end of Year 6 was above average. Key Stage 1 national test results show that younger pupils' attainment in writing has been above average for the last 2 years. The current attainment of Key Stage 2 pupils is broadly average, given their different abilities and starting points. The relentless focus on writing has resulted in good progress in raising attainment in this key skill. The introduction of writing about real life events has appealed to boys and, consequently, the quality of their work is often high. They enjoyed, for instance, being newspaper editors and creating headlines from topical stories. The range of writing now covered in the



improved curriculum means that pupils can apply their skills in different contexts, such as poetry. An older pupil wrote the following as part of a poem relating to the local seaside area, 'Polishing the smooth sand, the furious waves frothed!' The youngest children are keen to write. For example, in the Reception class, a spaceship controller was worried he had lost a spaceship on the way to Mars and wrote notes in the Space Log Book. Displays of writing throughout the school begin with celebrating the youngest children's mark-making and continue with examples of high-quality presentation in all classes. Improved tracking and analysis of data has enabled the school to close the gap between the attainment of those pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not. Consequently, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make faster progress in relation to their starting points. Until recently pupils, including more able pupils, were performing better in writing than in reading but recent results show that performance in reading is also now improving.

Parents appreciate the care and guidance afforded to their children. In a letter to the inspection team, one parent wrote, 'My son and daughter are thriving since becoming part of the Conifers family... I think the care and support provided are outstanding'. Discussions with pupils reflect the same level of confidence as pupils report they enjoy coming to school and meeting their friends. They are enthusiastic about lessons which are now more active and interesting. Pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have a worry or concern. Behaviour in class is exemplary and pupils work well together. For example, they discuss the merits of their writing and ask one another for help with spelling words. Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and enjoy taking part in a range of sports. Several pupils spoke with pride about their participation in the local carnival which is a good example of the level of community involvement. Work based around being a child evacuee during the Second World War illustrates the maturity with which the younger pupils reflect on how it would feel to be sent away from home. Their questions about these sensitive issues demonstrate a good moral and social understanding.

Teachers' consistent format for planning is generally adjusted to meet the differing needs of pupils. Effective teaching of writing is underpinned by teachers' good subject knowledge. Lessons are exciting, challenging and move along at a good pace and a range of learning techniques and high-quality resources are used to develop pupils' vocabulary and stimulate their imagination. For example, pupils handle fossils from the local area to develop a range of descriptive words in preparation for narrative writing. Pupils know their own targets for improvement. Their involvement in assessing their own work helps them know what the next steps are and how to improve their writing. Pupils report that they like the teachers' marking because it tells them how well they are doing. Pupils make good progress in lessons when learning is active. For example, younger pupils act out the middle part of their story in pairs using puppets as props. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities work independently as a result of work set, which enables them to make progress during the lesson. Occasionally tasks planned by teachers for groups are

not always broken down to enable individuals to practise their writing skills and move forward at a fast pace.

The high ambition and relentless drive of the headteacher and senior leadership team are unquestionable. Their focus on school improvement has been successfully cascaded down to middle managers, and in particular the English subject leader who has a clear understanding of her role. As a result, she has created appropriate action plans to improve pupils' skills in writing; these include a staff audit, monitoring, training and support ensuring that all teachers have good subject knowledge in English. Any weaknesses in teaching of English have been quickly identified by the leadership team and the appropriate support and challenge put in place so that all pupils make good progress. Through regular pupil progress meetings, the headteacher has ensured that all teachers are accountable for the progress of their pupils in writing. The joined-up approach of senior leaders has meant that leaders responsible for tracking the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have ensured that all adults working with individuals and groups of pupils are well trained, particularly in the teaching of phonics and writing. The governing body now has a much sharper understanding of its role. Together with senior leaders, they have ensured that the school rigorously monitors and evaluates its work. They have carried out their own self-evaluation of skills, and individual governors are now well matched to areas of the school's work, such as a link governor for English. This has contributed to a much more proactive approach in supporting and challenging the school's work.

The school has made effective use of good-quality support and training from the local authority. Effective guidance and challenge from the School Improvement Partner has continually challenged and supported the senior leaders and the governing body. This has enabled them to consistently focus on school improvement and to build a good capacity for further improvement.

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

Jane Neech

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Monitor with greater rigour to enable expectations to be raised and ensure more consistently good teaching.
- Provide greater challenge, excitement and interest in learning, and ensure tasks meet the individual needs of all pupils.
- Raise standards in writing, particularly in Years 1 and 2.