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30 June 2011

Mr P Newby
Headteacher
Brickhouse Primary School
Dudhill Road
Rowley Regis
B65 8HS

Dear Mr Newby

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 29 June 2011, for the time you gave to our planning discussions at the school and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also thank the pupils who spoke to me and your School Improvement Partner.

Since the last inspection, there have been some staff changes which involved moving teachers to different classes during the school year.

As a result of the inspection on 25 February 2010, 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The attainment of pupils in English and mathematics is below average, although the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points. Pupils make the most gains in reading but progress has also improved this year in writing, which has been the major focus of development. Despite the improvements in writing, overall progress remains too variable across the school. Not enough pupils are making consistently good progress. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They willingly engage with the tasks they are set and enjoy their lessons. Behaviour is mostly good. Attendance is low but improving. Since the inspection, the school has rightly identified that mathematics should also be a focus for development because of pupils' weaker and very varied progress in this subject. Pupils in the current Year 2 with special educational needs and/or disabilities have made inadequate progress in English.

September 2010



The main thrust of school development since the last inspection has been two-fold and has focused on:

- improving the way pupils' work is assessed and how their progress is monitored
- raising the profile of writing in the curriculum in order to improve pupils' skills more consistently.

There is now a clear procedure for assessing pupils' progress, especially in English. The assessment of pupils' work against nationally expected levels is more systematic and accurate. Teachers' ongoing marking of pupils' work is increasingly thorough and often identifies next steps for improvement. Older pupils said that they find teachers' comments helpful and some mentioned that they were given time to respond to the comments. Pupils are much more aware of their targets, especially in writing, and those who met with the inspector were able to identify particular aspects that they were trying to improve. Senior leaders' monitoring of marking shows that there are still some inconsistencies between teachers. The accuracy of teacher assessment has been improved but remains an area of development. The importance of the use of accurate assessment to check progress has been heightened with the introduction of half-termly pupil progress monitoring meetings between teachers and senior leaders. Senior leaders are aware that there is more work to do on improving the accuracy of assessment and linking the outcomes of assessment to teachers' lesson planning.

Pupils are now writing for a wider range of purposes across the curriculum. There is more extended writing and, generally, it receives a higher profile, evident not only in pupils' books but also through attractive classroom and corridor displays. There is still a way to go before the improvements in pupils' writing skills are firmly established across the curriculum. There has been a greater emphasis on improving the presentation of writing, and senior leaders are reviewing approaches to teaching spelling, especially to increase the accuracy of older pupils.

Senior leaders are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Lessons observed during this inspection were satisfactory. There is a good climate for learning established in classrooms. Relationships are good. Teachers are helping pupils to know what it is they should be learning and there are some good examples of pupils having the opportunity to explain their answers, which helps to develop their speaking and listening skills. Senior leaders and staff have worked effectively with the local authority to improve assessment and the quality of teaching. The range of opportunities for pupils to be involved in independent tasks and investigations is developing satisfactorily but is not firmly embedded within the curriculum. Pupils work together in a supportive way when involved in this type of work.

Although attendance is low, there has been a good reduction in the level of persistent absence and an increase in the proportion of pupils with high attendance. The work of the parent support worker and learning mentor, in conjunction with other agencies, has been very important in this area of the school's work. Absences are quickly followed up, including home visits as appropriate. There is due diligence in checking up on pupils, even if they have moved away, and there are compelling examples of where the interventions of the parent support worker and learning mentor have greatly improved the attendance of individual pupils. The greater involvement of parents and carers in the work of the school as volunteers and in their children's learning is a key strategy being used by the school, not only to improve attendance but also to raise attainment of pupils by helping parents and carers to become more knowledgeable about their children's schoolwork. Early signs are very promising. The developing range of activities being offered, for example tailor-made access to GCSE and other qualifications and more general 'improving skills' sessions, are welcomed by parents and carers, one of whom commented, 'For the first time, educated adults talk to me and I don't feel looked down upon.'

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

Daniel Towl
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise standards in writing and science by providing regular opportunities for pupils to:
 - engage in independent learning tasks
 - initiate their own investigations and problem-solving activities
 - produce extended writing for a range of audiences and purposes.
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- Improve all teaching to the standard of the best seen by:
 - ensuring pupils know their targets and how to reach them
 - checking that pupils follow the guidance given in marking
 - matching work more closely to the different learning needs of pupils
- Improve attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent by working closely with families and pupils, with the support of specialist agencies.