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2 December 2011

Mrs G Ramsay
Headteacher
Kilnhurst St Thomas CE Primary School
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Mexborough
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Dear Mrs Ramsay

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Kilnhurst St Thomas CE Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 December 2011 and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils I spoke with, the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority School Improvement Partner.

As a result of the inspection on 9 September 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.

In 2011, attainment rose at the end of Key Stage 2, partly because this small Year 6 group was more able than the group in 2010. Attainment in English improved and was in line with the national average. Pupils made similar progress in English as the previous year with almost all making the progress expected nationally. In 2010, pupils made inadequate progress in mathematics. In 2011, Year 6 pupils made better progress in mathematics and the gap between the school and the national average reduced. The gap between pupils' achievement in English and mathematics also reduced. Teacher assessments indicate continued low attainment and progress in science at the end of Key Stage 2. At the end of Key Stage 1, attainment declined and was particularly low in mathematics and reading. The progress made by this group of pupils was affected by long-term staff absence, which has now been resolved. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills in calculating are persistently weaker than their knowledge and understanding of number, shape and space. There was some improvement in 2011, but pupils continue to enter Key Stage 1 with skills in calculating that are well below average.

September 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Pupils' learning has improved as result of improved teaching and the use of assessment. The introduction of skills-based lesson objectives has given pupils a clearer focus on what they are expected to achieve. Furthermore, the introduction of a more detailed and explicit statement of the 'steps to success' to be carried out in the lesson provides a more effective approach to lesson planning and teaching. Mathematical activities have a sharper and more practical focus because they are focused more precisely on skills and methods. Pupils' knowledge of mathematics has been strengthened by more regular and frequent basic skills sessions, for example, learning the times tables. The progress made by pupils has improved, however, it is not consistent across all classes.

In mathematics lessons observed, a methodical approach, combined with good use of whiteboards, stimulated thinking and talking and enabled pupils to tackle problems well. Good relationships and well-focused dialogue enabled teaching to identify and correct misconceptions. However, teaching does not always meet the full range of abilities. For example, the challenge of presenting a deliberately incorrect example was appropriately challenging for the higher ability pupils, but proved confusing for pupils with a weaker understanding. Similarly, teaching did not sufficiently spell out for weaker pupils, learning how to decipher a number sequence, the different starting point needed to create a sequence. The observed teaching of English was both enthusiastic and well-structured. Pupils enjoyed their learning and made clear gains in their understanding of narrative and spelling.

Teachers' marking more frequently and consistently relates to lesson objectives. The best examples of marking in mathematics regularly give specific praise and areas for improvement. Procedures for pupils to respond to questions or comments in the marking have not been developed. Teaching assistants effectively support pupils with a statement of special educational needs and play a useful role in recording observations of other pupils' learning to inform assessment.

Observation by an external consultant identified inconsistencies in the way mathematical methods were used in different classes. As a result, a policy for calculating has been produced and is about to be implemented. New 'I can' targets for pupils provide more explicit guidance for pupils on the reading, writing and mathematical skills to be learnt each term. The school has helpfully begun to develop a minimum set of expectations for each year group in reading, writing and mathematics. The learning environment is improving but the use of 'working walls' to stimulate and guide the application of learning skills is underdeveloped. The introduction of a reward system for pupils' personal learning skills has enabled pupils to develop a stronger understanding of wider key skills.

The development of the electronic tracking system has raised expectations of the progress made by individuals and year groups. The more accessible and systematic reporting of progress has enabled all staff to evaluate progress and identify the needs of pupils with greater rigour. The more proactive identification of underachievement has led to the implementation of individual action plans. Plans to add the identification of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals to the tracking system have not yet been implemented. The

school takes insufficient account of the low attainment in science in tracking and evaluating progress.

As a result of additional training, support staff are developing a wider range of expertise in speech therapy, dyslexia and phonics to better meet the changing and diverse needs of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Intervention has been more effective in accelerating the progress made by individual pupils, especially in Year 6. The school is developing strategies of earlier intervention in order to accelerate the progress of younger pupils.

A local authority audit of mathematics provided useful prompts for developing an action plan. The action plan for mathematics is used well to review the implementation and impact of actions. A wider range of strategies for monitoring school improvement have been introduced, including scrutiny of pupils' work. Professional development, linked to work to improve mathematics in other local schools, has led to more practical strategies for teaching. Training has strengthened the use assessment in teaching. Visits to schools that are successful in teaching mathematics have begun to inform developments. Whole-school self-evaluation and action plans do not focus sharply enough on improving progress where data show it is weaker. Developments have been introduced effectively and staff and the governing body demonstrate a shared commitment to bring about improvement, especially in mathematics. These are at an early stage of implementation. They have begun to have a positive impact on learning but the impact on progress and attainment is limited so far.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment, particularly in mathematics by:
 - strengthening pupils' knowledge of basic skills, such as counting and times tables
 - ensuring that practical activities have a sharp focus and adult intervention moves learning forward at a faster pace
 - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensuring that work set meets the needs of all especially those of average ability
 - ensuring that marking, especially in mathematics, relates consistently to learning objectives and provides pupils with opportunities to respond.
- Ensure that leaders, managers and all staff refine their use of assessment information by using the new electronic tracking system to analyse thoroughly the performance of all groups in order to accelerate their progress.