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25 May 2006

The Appropriate Authority (through the Headteacher)

Mrs M Harker
The Headteacher
Bearwood Primary School
Bearwood Road
Smethwick
West Bromwich
B66 4HB

Dear Mrs Harker,

OFSTED MONITORING OF GRADE 3 SCHOOLS

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I visited your school on 25 May, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

Having considered carefully all the evidence presented by the school and the local authority, together with evidence from Ofsted data, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress on the issues identified at the last inspection.

The inspection in November 2005 identified improvements that were required in the following areas: standards in mathematics and writing at Key Stage 1; aspects of teaching, especially at Key Stage 1; the use of assessment information, particularly to match work better for more able pupils; opportunities for children in Reception to do more recording; and the role of subject leaders and the senior management team.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher accept the relevance of these issues and have worked keenly to tackle them. The local authority has provided good levels of support. Pertinent work was already underway but the inspection report has strengthened the emphasis given to some areas, such as improvement at Key Stage 1. The restructuring of the leadership team, which was being planned when the inspection was carried out, has been finalised and will take effect from September. It reduces the size of the senior team to four, with the intention of making it more strategic.

A second tier of management, at phase level, will be expected to focus more sharply on implementing changes. The attachment of a member of the senior team to each phase is sensible.

Improvements in the recording of assessment data and its analysis, instigated by the local authority, have strengthened the school's evaluation of its performance. The data is being used effectively to check on the progress which pupils are making and to identify where intervention is required. It shows that standards at Key Stage 1 are likely to equal those of last year's Year 2, which represents good progress from the pupils' starting points. The use of assessment by teachers, however, remains a weakness. Lesson planning does not routinely refer to pupils' attainment and teachers are not sufficiently familiar with what is required at each level, making it difficult for them to match work accurately to pupils' needs. The school has undertaken training on assessment for learning and teachers understand its importance. Nevertheless, there are examples of poor marking where pupils have not been given any information over the last term about how to improve.

Teachers are clearly trying to respond to the leadership team's efforts to raise the quality of teaching. All the lessons seen included an explicit focus on including more active ways of learning. In the Reception class, there was a strong focus on writing and evidence that the children understood what was required. However, the school's own monitoring across the school, confirmed by Her Majesty's Inspector, shows that there is still far too little teaching of good quality. There is also some that is inadequate. Until assessment and planning are better linked, the quality of teaching is unlikely to improve significantly. Teachers are also unused to organising learning in more active ways and sometimes struggle to manage activities and maintain the pace of learning.

The leadership team's monitoring, including very helpful and focused self reviews of a range of evidence, identifies accurately the weaknesses which need to be remedied. The resulting support provided by subject leaders is well focused and the school has made good strides in empowering these middle leaders to bring about improvement.

The need now is for the senior team and others with management responsibilities to give an even stronger lead on the methods which teachers should employ and to ensure that these are implemented consistently. The restructured leadership team, with its focus explicitly on learning and achievement, will be well placed to do this.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday
HM Inspector of Schools