

22 March 2007

Mrs A Cookson
Headteacher
Grosvenor Road Primary School
Parkgate Drive
Swinton
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M27 5LN

Dear Mrs Cookson

OFSTED MONITORING OF GRADE 3 SCHOOLS

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 21 March 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks also to the chair of governors, the local authority school improvement officer and local authority assistant director of resources for meeting me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in March 2006, the school was asked to:

- improve progress in Years 3 to 5
- raise the quality of teaching to that of the best by:
 - increasing teachers' subject knowledge and understanding
 - improving the use of assessment
 - making sure all teachers have high expectations
- improve governance by developing a rigorous range of activities for monitoring the school's performance.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

The local authority had designated the school as one causing concern some time before the inspection in March 2006 and had initiated support to raise standards. In summer 2006, the substantive headteacher retired and a new, experienced headteacher was appointed for September 2006. During that period, the full extent of the budget deficit became clear and the local authority finance officers, school

improvement officers and governing body prepared a revised budget recovery plan to reduce the deficit over a period of five years. The governing body has taken responsibility for this matter and now monitors very carefully the school's finances. Systems have been established to ensure that the chair of governors receives financial reports, including monthly statements of account, independently of the school and all governors are provided with a financial update each term through the headteacher's report to governors. The Staffing and Resource Committee now meet monthly to monitor the budget.

As a result of the judgement on governance in the inspection of March 2006, governors sought advice and support from the local authority on how to improve their effectiveness. After carrying out a self-audit of their work, they arrived at an agreed set of priorities for future development, including sharper scrutiny and monitoring of the school's work and working with parents and seeking their views. A full programme of training for governors has been established to enable them to develop their roles. Two governors have recently attended induction training and another attended teacher in-service training on writing.

Since the inspection, governors have been involved in a number of activities for which they have not been able to rely on the headteacher, such as meetings of the Dismissal Committee and Appeals Committee following redundancies in December 2006. There is an appropriate governing body committee structure in place and these meet regularly. Minutes of the most recent meeting of the Staffing and Resources Committee show that it is well prepared and well documented.

The new headteacher has established a programme of regular lesson observations, an overview of which she reports back to governors. Her assessment of the quality of teaching across the school is that it is variable but satisfactory overall. On this monitoring inspection I observed six English lessons, all in Years 3 to 5, and these were satisfactory. The school has as its current main priorities the teaching of writing and the development of the teaching of reading across the school. All teachers have undertaken training in: a commercial writing development programme; a systematic phonic programme, handwriting and the development of the gifted and talented child. In addition, teachers in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 have undertaken training in phonics and reading recovery. As a result, there is now a consistency in approach to the teaching of English which allows all staff to discuss issues with a common vocabulary and insight. This consistency is evident in the pupils' recognition, knowledge and understanding, for example, of key technical vocabulary and methods of working. In turn, teachers are more aware of where children are making progress and where they are not. The use of assessment is improving as is seen in the greater focus on pupils' targets and overall tracking of pupils' progress.

In the lessons observed, there was a strong focus in the teaching on the stated learning objectives and the evidence from pupils' books is that teachers mark to these objectives. However, too often the marking does not also pick up on the basic errors that pupils make, for example, in their spellings and these persist over time. In all

classes observed, teachers spent too long talking whilst the pupils spent too little time writing.

In the 2006 national assessments for seven year olds, the school's results fell significantly in each of the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. Boys performed considerably worse than girls in reading and writing. The school's response: to strengthen the teaching of phonics, high frequency words and introduce more structure to the teaching of reading in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is appropriate.

The results in Key Stage 2 were better overall, but English remains the weakest of the three core subjects: only 64% of pupils gained level 4 or above in English. This is below the threshold level which the government requires no primary school to fall. Again, boys performed much less well than girls in the school and compared to all boys nationally.

Nevertheless, the measures taken to tackle these issues are beginning to have an impact and pupils are making better progress. The clearest evidence for this is their reading ages. The school has set itself the target of ensuring all pupils gain a reading age in line with their birthday age. All pupils in Years 1 to 6 took a reading test in September 2006 and were retested in January or February this year. In September, the results showed that in only one year group were 70% of pupils reading at age appropriate levels. In most classes, the figure was well below this. By February, the corresponding figures had improved: in all year groups at least half of all pupils had reading ages in line with their birthday ages and in Years 4, 5 and 6, the percentages were 70% and above. There has been a corresponding improvement in pupils' writing scores as measured by National Curriculum sublevels, with pupils across all year groups and abilities making progress. The greatest gains in writing have been made by those pupils who have made the greatest gains in their reading. However, the written work in pupils' English books does not reflect the higher levels of writing that they are now capable of producing. Teachers' expectations of the standards at which pupils could and should be working every day have not yet caught up with the new reality. Assessments in mathematics show improvements across the school but on a smaller scale than in English.

Thank you again for your hospitality and welcome. I hope that you found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Angela M Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector