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10 July 2007

Mrs Sonia Innes
Headteacher
Thurton CE VC Primary School
Ashby Road
Thurton
Norfolk
NR14 6AT

Dear Mrs Innes,

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 July, 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 to the chair of governors, temporary acting headteacher and the pupils and staff who helped me during the day.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 December 2006, the school was asked to raise achievement in Key Stage 2 by using its data to challenge pupils more effectively and by enabling subject leaders to help raise standards. You were also asked to involve pupils more actively in lessons and ensure they have a better understanding of how to improve their work. There was also a concern about health and safety that needed attention. Shortly after the inspection, you were absent through illness for some time. The local authority's statement of action included contingency plans to ensure effective leadership pending your full return to work. These have included the appointment of an interim acting headteacher who continued to implement your plans successfully in your absence.

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 and in raising the pupils' achievements. Your own analysis of the current picture, your personal contribution and your vision for the future are very strong features in the progress made. The chair of governors has worked very closely and effectively with the school and local authority to secure improvement. Governors carry out close ongoing monitoring. Your strategies are summarised in a well structured improvement plan which provides a clear framework for monitoring and evaluating success.

To improve Key Stage 2 achievement, staff have established better accuracy and more rigour in their systems for assessing, tracking and analysing academic progress. These help teachers to match lessons more precisely to pupils' needs. Extra programmes of work support particular needs, especially for any pupils at risk of underachieving. Pupils speak highly of the individual attention they get during such work. Teachers have identified gaps in pupils' mathematical and scientific skills and have tailored work to address them. Your action in all these areas now needs to be sustained. Records show that pupils are currently making at least satisfactory overall progress. Results for the current Year 6 have risen considerably in science since last year. Standards are not yet high enough in mathematics, particularly in how many pupils reach Level 5. This remains an area for further improvement.

Action to involve pupils more actively in their learning has had a satisfactory impact. Pupils are very positive about the higher level of practical activity, how targets are set with them and how marking helps them improve. Nonetheless, lesson observations during my visit confirmed the school's view that work remains to be done to carry on improving pupils' levels of independence and initiative in lessons.

You have addressed the health and safety issue urgently and effectively with good support from the local authority.

On subject leadership, you have sensibly focused on the core subjects, with the intention that the skills acquired by staff will transfer more widely in due course. A good training programme involves contacts with staff in other schools, good use of local authority expertise and good quality guidance documents for staff. Teachers are being trained to carry out lesson observations and to analyse performance data. Action will continue when the school joins the local authority's Intensifying Support Programme next term. The school is already seeing the benefits of teachers' improved ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision. Staff need to continue to sharpen these skills and integrate them more fully into their practice.

The school has received good support from the local authority. Well targeted involvement of advisers and specialists linked to all the initiatives has gone a long way in aiding the satisfactory rate of progress, in spite of continuing staffing difficulties. There has been good support with interim headteacher and deputy head arrangements. You still face challenges in replacing retiring staff and covering maternity leave, but have the local authority's commitment to supporting you in this.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ranger
Additional Inspector