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Mrs Linda Foxton  
Headteacher  
St Botolph's Church of England Primary School  
Back Hills  
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Dear Mrs Foxton

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 October, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors 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 5 and 6 February 2007, the school was asked to ensure that its leaders set high expectations and clear direction by systematic monitoring, identifying its priorities for improvement accurately. Secondly, to improve achievement by rigorously analysing pupils' performance and setting challenging targets for them and finally, to ensure that all lessons set high expectations for pupils and provided them with stimulating work.

Shortly after the inspection, the headteacher left and an interim headteacher is filling this vacancy until July 2008. There have also been several other staff changes, including the recent appointment of a new deputy headteacher.

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' achievement. Key features in the progress made have been the good evaluation of the initiatives needed to improve the school and the valuable contribution of governors, most notably the chair of governors, in helping the school to formulate and monitor its action plans. Staff and governors have worked closely and effectively with the local authority (LA) to secure improvement. There has been well-targeted involvement of local advisers and specialists and good support from the LA during the many staffing changes.

Good plans have been drawn up for training staff and governors to improve the ways that school leaders set high expectations and give clear direction. These have a strong focus on effective ways of monitoring and evaluating the quality of education, and pupils' achievement. This includes key areas such as the analysis of performance data, effective lesson observations and the scrutiny of teachers' planning and of pupils' work. Staff speak very positively about how this training has brought new perspectives to their roles, for example, as subject leaders. Even at this relatively early stage, there are already indications of the impact these actions are having on pupils' achievement. The various planning documents include useful criteria for checking the success of initiatives. However, these criteria are not yet sufficiently precise in identifying the expected improvements in pupils' learning and achievement.

There has been good progress in setting up the systems needed to analyse pupils' academic performance more effectively. Class teachers are much more involved in collecting and analysing relevant data. They are now more familiar with the tools that help them to check how pupils' progress, for example, how it compares with the national picture, through using data such as the 'RAISEonline' report. Most importantly, a review of the systems used to track each pupil's progress through the school has led to their improvement. However, there is not yet a secure enough way of establishing pupils' attainment when they start school to act as a baseline from which to judge their subsequent progress. The school is now beginning to build up a more useful body of information to inform the targets it sets for the school as a whole. Target setting for individual pupils and for each class, has also been improved, especially in literacy and numeracy. The school's results in the 2007 national tests do not show significant improvement over those of 2006. The relatively low proportions of pupils who reach the higher levels indicate that the systematic actions now taking place must continue if they are to have a measurable impact on overall achievement.

Action to set higher expectations in lessons and to provide stimulating work has shown satisfactory progress. There is good monitoring of teachers' short-term planning. The teachers say the most important improvement from this is in the way they now tailor activities more closely to the needs of all pupils. Lesson observations during the visit showed good examples of this. Although, even when the written planning is good, there are still inconsistencies in how well teachers translate their plans into practice. This aspect of the school's work needs to remain a focus for further improvement. Pupils enjoy lessons, particularly those where there is plenty of active participation and practical activity, of which several examples were seen. The recent monitoring of lessons by senior staff and the LA indicates that previously inadequate practice has been eliminated and that an increasing proportion of lessons are now good or sometimes, outstanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Ranger  
Additional Inspector