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Mrs J Woolfenden
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Dear Mrs Woolfenden

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also extend my thanks to the local authority (LA) advisor, the staff and pupils with whom I met. 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 on 18 and 19 October 2006, the school was asked to raise standards and pupils' achievement, particularly in English at Key Stage 2; improve the quality of teaching and learning, including marking; and improve teachers' use of assessment, target-setting and management information systems in order to raise pupils' achievement. Since the previous inspection the school has experienced considerable changes in staffing. A new headteacher has been appointed and a new deputy headteacher took up post in January in 2008. The Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 continue to be housed in temporary accommodation as the school is being rebuilt because of a fire.

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.

Standards at Key Stage 2 have risen since the previous inspection. In the most recent statutory assessments, the school met its targets and in some cases exceeded them. Results in English, which the school was asked to focus upon, rose from 72% to 76% at the expected Level 4. Results for more able pupils who gained the higher Level 5 improved from 14% to 21%. Standards also rose in science at the expected Level 4 and more modestly at Level 5. Results in mathematics dipped slightly. In Key Stage 1, however, results declined, particularly in reading and writing. This was due to considerable discontinuity in staffing and some inconsistency in assessment practice. The school is aware of the urgent need to raise standards at Key Stage 1

and has responded appropriately. A part-time teacher has been employed to improve the reading skills of a targeted group of pupils in Year 2. The support provided by additional adults for this year group has also been increased. A whole-school project, termed the 'Big Write,' designed to raise the attainment of pupils in writing, has been initiated. This is beginning to provide pupils with more opportunities to write at length. The school has begun to look at ways for pupils to practise these skills in other subjects. Overall, pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning and some, particularly in Key Stage 2, are making good progress.

Lessons in most classes were sampled during the inspection and the inspector's findings confirm the school's view that a greater proportion of teaching is now good. However, time is not always well used. A number of teachers and teaching assistants have visited other schools to observe good practice. The school's teaching and learning policy has been suitably revised to include useful sections on how pupils learn, the range of teaching styles that can be deployed, and how learning can be accelerated. Pupils reported that they had noticed a wider variety of teaching methods since the last inspection, including greater use of role play and interactive whiteboards. One staff meeting has focused on the characteristics of good teaching and others have also covered this theme with the result that teachers have a clearer view of what constitutes effective teaching. The headteacher monitors teaching regularly and rigorously, and gives appropriate feedback to staff. Weaknesses in teaching have been tackled robustly. Several staff meetings have focused on improving teachers' planning. Literacy and numeracy planning is routinely monitored by subject managers for these areas and teachers are advised of areas for improvement. Most planning indicates clearly how work will be matched to pupils' different abilities. Extra staffing has been deployed to enable pupils in Years 5 and 6, including the least able, to be taught in smaller groups, based on their abilities. The school considers this to be a positive move, although it is too early to fully evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.

The school's marking policy has been revised and a scrutiny of pupils' work carried out to check how well it has been implemented. Staff have been advised of any inconsistencies. The marking code is usefully displayed in each classroom and is appropriately simplified for younger pupils. Marking of literacy work helpfully highlights where pupils have met their learning objectives. Work completed in classes is marked regularly, although some pupils commented that homework is not always marked. Most comments are of a positive nature and some offer pupils clear guidance on the next steps to take in order to improve. The school knows that this aspect of guidance is a key area for improvement and is part of a local network which is developing this approach.

Systems for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils have been extended and made more consistent. Teachers have been issued with mark books and assessment files, along with guidance on their use. Pupils' attainment in the core subjects is recorded regularly. All staff have been made aware of the national curriculum levels which pupils are expected to reach by the end of each academic year. Reports to parents have been revised to show the attainment of pupils in the core subjects and whether they are working above, below or at the level expected for their age group.

The attainment of each year group has been usefully matched against the nationally expected levels and shared with all staff. Consequently, the school has a clearer picture of which year groups are on track to meet the expected levels and which are underachieving. Teachers have used assessment information appropriately to plan teaching groups for older pupils and work for learners of different abilities. Assessment data have been used by the headteacher to inform 'progress meetings' with staff, where the achievement of pupils is beginning to be analysed. As a result, teachers have drawn up action plans to raise the attainment of pupils in their class. However, there is scope for the school to make greater use of available value-added data so that it knows not only how much progress pupils are making, but also whether individual pupils are achieving all that they can. A new tracking system has also been introduced for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This gives a very clear picture of the progress these pupils are making. The newly appointed assessment manager has apt plans to build on this approach so that the progress of all pupils can be tracked. Useful steps have also been taken to provide teachers with more opportunities to work together to check that their assessments of how well pupils are doing are correct.

The school has further developed its target-setting procedures and targets for future pupils in Year 6 are appropriately challenging. There is an increasing use of targets at a class and individual level, particularly in literacy. However, not all pupils know the national curriculum levels they are working at, the levels they are working towards and what they must do in order to improve. As yet, there are few examples of exemplary work displayed in the school to show pupils the levels to which they can aspire.

In addition to developing its management information systems, the school has strengthened its procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and these now meet current requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector