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Mrs Catherine Frost
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Frost

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the nominated staff, pupils and the representative of the local authority (LA) with whom I met.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 13 February 2007, the school was asked to review the amount of teaching time in Key Stages 1 and 2 and eliminate time slippage in lessons; to ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 1 received their entitlement to a daily structured phonics session; and to improve the management of the teaching of reading. The school was also asked to improve teachers' skills in assessing pupils' work according to National Curriculum levels and to increase the proportion of good and better teaching.

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.

In the inspection of February 2007, pupils' attainment was found to be satisfactory overall. Weaknesses were identified in the progress made by pupils in Key Stage 1. In the statutory assessments in 2007, pupils' overall attainment in Key Stage 1 dipped slightly. Provisional data provided by the school during the monitoring inspection indicates that standards in Key Stage 1 are rising in reading and writing. In Key Stage 2, assessment information held by the school suggests that results will rise in English and mathematics.

The school day has been lengthened and teaching times in Key Stage 1 and 2 now exceed the national minimum recommendations. In addition, new arrangements for the entry of pupils to school in the morning mean there are extra opportunities for them to learn additional skills prior to the formal start of the school day. These arrangements also assist the prompt start of lessons. In lessons observed, time was generally well used by teachers and the pace of lessons was mainly good. The headteacher monitors teaching time and issues reminders about its use when necessary.

A daily phonics session now takes place in all classes in Key Stage 1. New resources have been purchased and training in phonics has been provided for all staff in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and for some in Key Stage 2. Most sessions are of a suitable length and a common planning format has been adopted, which some teachers annotate well to record the progress pupils make. The most effective teaching fully involves pupils and helps them to apply the lessons learned. Resources, such as interactive whiteboards, are generally used well. There is scope for the use of additional adults to be improved. The school has recognised this and has apt plans to trial a new approach to phonic sessions.

The school's home-reading system has been reorganised in Key Stage 1 and parents have been informed of these changes. Extensive new resources have been purchased and are well organised. A new, clearer, system for classifying these resources has been introduced which is now due to be extended into Key Stage 2. A new method for tracking the progress of pupils in reading these books has also been introduced. Both initiatives have ensured that home-reading books are now much more closely matched to pupils' abilities and have provided the school with a clearer oversight of the progress pupils are making in reading. They have also raised pupils' enthusiasm for reading and have ensured greater continuity in home-reading arrangements when pupils move into Key Stage 2. However, information for new staff on how reading is managed is informal and would benefit from inclusion in the staff handbook. Extra materials for guided reading in Key Stage 1 have also been purchased and more reading resources are planned for Key Stage 2 following a review of current resources. The effectiveness of these measures has yet to be fully assessed but the school has plans to monitor the teaching of reading, having previously focused on the teaching of phonics. Plans for the improvement of reading are included in the school improvement plan, although these could be more detailed, for example in terms of specific tasks for the school's literacy subject leaders to undertake in order to drive up standards in literacy.

Teachers' skills in assessing pupils' work according to National Curriculum levels have improved. New assessment materials have been purchased for mathematics. The headteacher and staff have worked hard successfully to put in place effective systems to track the attainment and progress of pupils based on regular testing and assessments. The school is becoming data-rich and this information is increasingly well used to set appropriate and challenging targets and to identify underperformance. For example, assessment data inform regular 'progress meetings' between the headteacher and class teachers at which the achievement of pupils is analysed. This has increased the accountability of staff.

The introduction of the 'Big Write' programme has developed teachers' proficiency in assessing the National Curriculum levels in writing at which pupils are working. Staff have benefited from good opportunities to work on this initiative with colleagues from different year groups. The writing skills of pupils have improved as a result of this initiative and they are more aware of the level they are working at in writing. A portfolio of levelled writing, for staff to draw on when assessing pupils' work, has yet to be drawn up. There are also few displays of exemplary writing to show pupils the higher levels to which they can aspire and how they can improve. Pupils are not clear about the levels they are working at, or towards, in other subjects. The approach to assessing levels adopted in writing could usefully be extended to other subjects.

Appropriate steps have been taken to increase the proportion of good teaching. 'Learning walks' have been initiated by the headteacher and useful feedback is given to staff on areas for improvement. There are apt plans for senior leaders to be trained in the coaching of staff. Several joint observations have been carried out with LA consultants and there is regular observation of teaching by senior leaders. Consequently, identified weaknesses in teaching have been tackled. The results of lesson observations are collated, but there is scope for these to be analysed regularly so that the school has a clearer statistical overview of improvements in the quality of teaching. Teachers' planning and the work of pupils are monitored. Several teachers have observed good practice but there is room to give staff greater opportunities to observe identified good practice both in the school and in other settings. LA and other consultants have provided training on a number of aspects of good teaching, such as effective questioning. These key characteristics of what constitutes good teaching could usefully be summarised in a revised teaching and learning policy. The LA has provided sound support for the school. As well as funding an intervention programme to improve the quality of teaching and learning, its consultants have visited the school regularly to advise and train staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector