

12 June 2008

Mrs M Boardman
The Headteacher
Heap Bridge Village Primary School
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Heap Bridge
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Dear Mrs Boardman

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 11 June 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 governors and especially the pupils who gave up their time to tell me about the school.

Since the last inspection building work has been completed and classes have moved into their new accommodation. Pupils have access to the full extent of the playground. The headteacher is retiring at the end of this term and her successor has been appointed.

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 October 2007, the school was asked to do the following.

- Improve teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 in order to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement.
- Track pupils' progress more closely in Years 3 to 6 in order to identify underperformance and to provide more appropriate teaching.
- Ensure that pupils are aware of how they are doing in their work and what precisely they need to do to improve.

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 pupils' achievement.

Results of the 2007 national Key Stage 1 assessments indicate that pupils reached above average standards by the end of Year 2. This represents a fall from a steady

trend of well above average standards. The provisional outcomes of the 2008 assessments show that standards are lower this year, particularly in writing. There is a marked dip in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Key Stage 2 national test results in 2007 showed a rise in standards in all core subjects: performance was in line with national averages. The school's current data indicate that this year's results are likely to be a little lower. Pupils' good achievement at Key Stage 1 has not been sustained at Key Stage 2 in recent years. However, the school's tracking information about every pupil shows that progress has accelerated across the school this year. Most pupils are making at least the progress expected of them: in some year groups the majority are moving ahead more rapidly than this, overcoming the legacy of previous underachievement. However, although Year 6 pupils have increased their rate of progress this year, the school's data show that their achievement in Key Stage 2 is inadequate overall.

Visits to Key Stage 2 lessons during the inspection confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning has improved. Pupils are making better progress as a consequence of more focused teaching aimed more accurately at pupils' learning needs. Strengths of the lessons observed include starters that grab pupils' interest; clear instructions; lessons divided into manageable sections with opportunities to refocus pupils on their tasks; effective use of brief, targeted, paired discussions; and a brisk pace. Where learning is less effective, work is not fully matched to pupils' skills and understanding, and lessons are not divided into manageable sections so that the momentum of learning is sustained.

A significant factor influencing improvements in teaching and learning is teachers' access to, and understanding of, information about what pupils know, understand and can do. The school has established a coherent system, founded on regular, frequent assessments, for tracking the progress of individual pupils. The information gained from this is being used with increasing precision to plan lessons and this is having a positive effect on pupils' progress. Expectations are rising because staff have a clearer grasp of what is usual in terms of both standards and progress for pupils in each age group. The school is now identifying underachievers quickly and putting appropriate interventions in place to help them catch up. The impact of the various intervention strategies adopted is evaluated regularly.

The school is setting suitable individual targets in the core subjects for pupils. Pupils know these and are motivated by the challenge to achieve them through a series of steps to success. Key Stage 2 pupils spoken to were enthusiastic about the process. They have a sense of ownership because they share with teachers the evaluation of their own progress. This is successfully developing the dialogue about learning between teachers and pupils. The introduction of a traffic light system in lessons for pupils to let the teacher know their level of understanding of a new aspect of learning is enhancing this. The use of 'thumbs up or down' responses in lessons is a further positive aspect of pupils' increasing involvement in their own learning. Pupils are clearer about how they are getting on and what they need to do to improve. The new whole-school marking policy is playing a significant part in this because pupils are given clear pointers for improvement alongside acknowledgements of their successes. Pupils are increasingly applying a similar system to their own work and that of their classmates. This is making a positive contribution to their personal

development as they learn to be positive about the successes of others, sensitive in pointing out what could be improved and resilient in accepting criticism.

The local authority's (LA's) action plan provides a coherent structure for the continued, considerable, and good support for the school begun some time prior to the last inspection. The introduction of the Intensive Support Programme was well judged. This is providing a tight, helpful structure for the development of the systematic tracking of pupils' progress, target setting and differentiated learning. Local authority consultants have provided well targeted support matched to the identified priorities of individual teachers. The LA was instrumental in establishing the partnership with a local primary school which is providing a good model for improvements at all levels.

The introduction of the system for tracking pupils' progress has proved a key lever for improvement. Some supporting management systems are in place to ensure that the information gathered is used effectively to improve learning and accelerate pupils' progress. However, the school now needs to establish its own sustainable systems for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of its work, using the outcomes to identify priorities and planning thoroughly for its future improvement. While the school has benefited a great deal from the support of its partner school and the LA, it now needs to develop fully its own clear sense of direction and the means to achieve this.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector