

19 June 2008

Mr P Hardwick  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hardwick

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 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 the children who gave up their free time to talk to me about the school.

A number of staff changes, including at senior level, will have been completed by the start of the next autumn term. You have begun to work with the support of a newly formed task group shared with the local family of schools. However, the continuous service of yourself and other senior staff is giving the school stable leadership.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 26 and 27 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science by Year 6 and improve pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2
- improve teachers' use of assessment, thus enabling them to provide pupils with work that challenges them to achieve and to identify at an early stage those who are underachieving
- reduce the number of priorities in the school development plan so that weaknesses can be tackled more effectively to bring about improved learning.

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.

Results of the 2007 national tests indicated that pupils reached low standards at the end of Year 2, as has been the case for some years. Provisional results for Year 2, in 2008, show that standards are higher this year and most targets were met.

National Key Stage 2 tests in 2007 indicated that standards were well below average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. They confirmed that progress in this key stage was inadequate. Pupils' performance in the writing test fell sharply. The school's assessments indicate that this year's results are likely to be a little higher. The school's detailed tracking information about every pupil shows progress has improved across the school this year. Most pupils are making the progress expected of them. However, a significant number have not made the accelerated progress needed to make up for previous underachievement. As a result, although Year 6 pupils have increased their rate of progress this year, the school's data suggest that their achievement overall is below average.

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. Pupils' written work in Year 6 indicates that standards are closer to average than was indicated by last year's test results, though there is scope to improve teachers' grasp of the expected standards and how to help pupils reach them. Strengths of the lessons observed include the use of clear success criteria to define manageable steps in learning, with opportunities to review progress; the effective use of brief discussions between paired pupils; the use of wall displays by teachers to guide and support pupils; clear instructions and a brisk pace balanced with opportunities to reflect. Where learning is less effective, work is not fully matched to pupils' skills and understanding and the use of success criteria and paired talk is limited to a mechanical level which does not challenge pupils enough.

A significant factor influencing improvements in teaching is teachers' increasing understanding of information about what pupils can already do. The school has a coherent system based on regular assessments for tracking the progress of individual pupils. The school identifies and supports underachievers quickly and puts appropriate interventions in place to help them catch up. The impact of intervention strategies is evaluated regularly. The information from assessment is used with increasing effect to plan challenging and differentiated lessons. Expectations are rising because staff have a clearer grasp of what is the normal expectation of standards and progress for each age group. However, there has not yet been an effective analysis of pupils' outcomes against the different assessment foci.

A start has been made on setting pupils suitable individual targets in mathematics and English. Pupils spoken to, know these targets, are motivated to achieve them, and find the teachers' clarification helpful in understanding how to do so. Teachers involve them in the process of evaluating their progress. Key Stage 2 pupils spoken to were enthusiastic about this and were able to discuss their learning quite knowledgeably. Marking is increasingly helping them by acknowledging success and giving more precise pointers for improvement. Pupils are learning to assess their own work systematically and show a resilient and constructive response to criticism. However, targets recorded in pupils' books were not always followed up, for example, in marking comments.

The local authority has provided intensive support to the school for some time, which has provided a helpful structure for the development of systems to promote

progress. Local authority consultants have provided support suitably targeted on priorities such as the development of writing, phonic skills and mathematical and scientific understanding. Reviews have been regular and have become more robust. Most significantly, the local authority has been instrumental in establishing a task group led by a National Leader in Education to support the local family of schools. Though still at an early stage, this is welcomed by the school and is making its mark on classroom practice.

The school has a clear sense of what it has achieved and what remains to be done. It is firmly focused on a simpler improvement plan with a manageable number of pertinent priorities. Responsibility for key issues has been rationally shared among the leadership team. The school has good systems for tracking progress which it uses with increasing effectiveness to inform teaching. It monitors some key aspects of its work thoroughly, using outcomes to identify appropriate priorities for the future. On the other hand, the review of the development plan focuses more on activity than impact. Success criteria do not in all cases include measurable milestones to aid the reporting of progress. The school is open to learning from its partners, and shows a calm and steady determination that its pupils should achieve as well as is expected.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles  
Her Majesty's Inspector