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Mr David Ratcliff  
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Dear Mr David Ratcliff

#### Ofsted monitoring of Notice to Improve schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 July 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to all the people with whom I spoke: the staff; pupils; the chair of the governing body; and your school improvement partner.

The school is about to go through some significant staff changes. The headteacher is due to retire and one teacher is leaving at the end of this term. The deputy headteacher has secured employment in another school but will remain in school until an appropriate appointment to replace his teaching duties has been made. The headteacher has taken on the role of subject leader for mathematics since the previous inspection during the absence of a teacher on maternity leave. A new headteacher has been appointed and staff have been appointed on temporary contracts to ensure a complete staff at the start of the new term. The school is moving to single age classes for the teaching of literacy and numeracy in all year groups from September. Five new governors have been appointed since the previous inspection.

As a result of the inspection in November 2007, the school was asked to improve in the following ways.

- Ensure assessment procedures are used consistently and effectively so that teaching provides challenge for all pupils and, in particular, it increases the rate of pupils' progress in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure that improvements quickly become embedded in practice and that checks on their effectiveness are focused on the impact on pupils' learning.
- Implement the best marking practice so that all pupils know what they must 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 the pupils' achievement.

The provisional results of the 2008 Year 6 national tests indicate a significant improvement in standards compared with previous years, especially in mathematics. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age increased dramatically by 38 percentage points and the school's target was exceeded by 30 percentage points. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 increased substantially and the target was exceeded significantly; it was more than doubled. In English, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age increased by 17 percentage points and the school's target was exceeded by two percentage points. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 was lower than in 2007 and the target was not met. The targets set for these pupils were modest and in line with progress made in most schools. The school is now setting more ambitious targets for its pupils and has higher expectations of them.

The school's tracking information shows that most pupils are making progress in line with the national expectation and that progress accelerates as they move through Key Stage 2. Progress is not as rapid in English as in mathematics and is weaker in writing than in reading. Although the school has worked on developing teaching and learning in both English and mathematics, there has been a greater focus on mathematics because pupils were further behind in this subject. The school plans to refocus on improving learning and teaching of English, especially writing. A factor affecting progress in Years 3 and 4 is the large classes created by splitting Year 4 pupils between two classes. This will not be the case for the next school year. Work seen in books and in lessons in Key Stage 2 indicates that pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in literacy and mathematics. In most lessons seen, pupils made good progress in response to good teaching with an appropriate level of challenge for the majority of pupils.

Since the previous inspection the school has focused successfully on improving lesson planning, the use of assessment information to ensure that work is challenging and the effective use of marking. Lessons in Key Stage 2 are planned and structured to a common format. Plans set out what will be learned clearly and include relevant and varied learning activities and opportunities to review what has been learned. In most lessons teachers plan work to match pupils' different abilities and ensure challenge, based on their knowledge of their progress. However, planning does not always make sure that gaps in prior learning are filled. This is more successful in mathematics than in literacy as teachers are beginning to use more refined methods to assess and record progress in mathematics. Demanding tasks are set for higher attaining pupils in many lessons but there are occasions when tasks need to provide even greater challenge in both mathematics and literacy.

The use of targets to guide learning in literacy and numeracy has helped to raise teachers', pupils' and parents' aspirations and expectations. Pupils like having targets and their self-esteem and confidence is boosted when they reach them. The targets are not always used fully to support learning. Some targets are not easily understood

by the pupils and they are not always readily to hand or at the forefront of pupils' thinking as they work.

Pupils assess their own and each other's work in most lessons, helping pupils to confirm what they know and understand. On occasions the success criteria teachers share with pupils to help them make assessments are too complex and not explained well enough to them.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and behaviour is good. They enjoy active involvement when learning in mathematics. They are encouraged to explain what they find out. The effective use of 'talk partners', when pupils discuss their work with a partner, is developing. This approach is not yet used extensively enough in both mathematics and literacy. Classrooms environments support learning well having attractive displays that include guidance on literacy and numeracy work, interactive tasks where pupils try out challenges for themselves, and examples of pupils' good work. Most teaching assistants work effectively alongside pupils in small groups. There are times when the class is working as a whole group when they could be more usefully deployed, for example, on quietly checking understanding or joining in as a 'talk partner'.

Staff follow the school policy for marking pupils' work. Pupils understand the system of 'green and pinks' that identify success and improvements needed and they find the comments useful and encouraging. Comments are sometimes too general and not related closely enough to the objectives for the lesson or pupils' learning targets. The requirement of the policy to mark a piece of work in literacy and numeracy once per fortnight is not frequent enough although most teachers mark work more frequently than this. Pupils are increasingly responding to the marking but are not always given enough time in which to make improvements.

The headteacher, and the leaders for numeracy and literacy, with effective support from the local authority, have increased the level of monitoring and evaluation. There is an established cycle of monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress, their written work and of lessons, carried out by the headteacher as a senior leader and by subject leaders of literacy and numeracy. Monitoring has become increasingly focused, for example, on the helpfulness of marking, pupils' involvement in assessing their own progress, the use of questioning to provide challenge in lessons, and the match of tasks to pupils' abilities in planning. The close focus on these issues has led to improvements. The link is not yet being made fully between what has been monitored and the outcomes for pupils. For example, when the match of tasks to pupils' different abilities was the focus this was not checked alongside the progress of different groups of pupils.

The support provided by the local authority has been satisfactory, leading to satisfactory progress overall. Ofsted required the following revision to the local authority statement of support.

- Without losing sight of the aim to build long-term-improvement, a sharper focus is needed on how the immediate short-term priorities will be tackled. These are the reasons for the Notice to Improve, the matters listed as 'what the school should do to improve further'.

The local authority was not aware of this expectation and the statement of support has not been revised. However, the Intensive Support Programme (ISP) and the Raising Achievement Plan that underpins the development work of the school have addressed how all the short-term priorities listed as 'what the school should do to improve' will be tackled.

The school was already part of ISP prior to the inspection. Following the inspection, the programme was adapted to ensure that the areas identified for improvement were tackled and there was an even closer focus on improvements in mathematics, alongside continuing developments in English. Local authority consultants were flexible in responding to the needs of the school. Staff have responded positively to the support since the inspection. Subject leaders for mathematics and English have been especially well supported in improving planning, the use of assessment to ensure challenge, marking of pupils' work and monitoring and evaluation. The impact of the improvements on pupils' progress is more evident in mathematics than in English.

The contribution of the National School Leader Scheme commissioned by the local authority has been valued by the headteacher and staff. The sharing of good practice has been appreciated, particularly in developing approaches in mathematics.

Regular visits by the school improvement officer and the meetings of the school specific monitoring group have helped to accelerate the pace of progress and to keep governors informed of the progress the school is making as governors develop their monitoring role more fully.

In the light of imminent changes in staffing at leadership and classroom level the local authority recognises the need to maintain intensive support in order to ensure that the improvements made are sustained.

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

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith  
Additional Inspector