

13 May 2008

Mrs Iris Cerny  
Whitmore Junior School  
Whitmore Way  
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Dear Mrs Cerny

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 7 May 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 the governors' representatives, the pupils and staff who helped me during the day.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 11 – 12 September 2007, the school was asked to raise pupils' standards and improve achievement, particularly in English, mathematics and science; improve the quality of teaching so staff are knowledgeable about pupils' needs; improve the work of subject leaders and increase the variety of ways pupils' learning is assessed in lessons ensuring there is a systematic process of tracking pupils' progress over time.

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.

One of the key elements in the progress seen to date is the clear understanding by the school leadership of what is needed to raise levels of achievement and the commitment of the staff and governing body. All are working closely with the local authority (LA) to secure improvement. The revised LA statement of action, along with the school's raising attainment plan (RAP), is providing clear direction to the work of the school. The school's involvement in the intensifying support programme (ISP) for a third year is providing an additional boost. Well targeted support of LA advisors, consultants, advanced skills teachers and other outside agencies is providing valuable advice and guidance along with a range of well matched professional development.

Monitoring records indicate that most of the previously inadequate teaching has been eliminated. This is the result of more rigorous monitoring, good quality guidance and continuing professional development. Expectations have been made clear and with improvements to lesson planning and classroom management, teaching is now satisfactory overall. However, there is still not enough consistently good quality teaching to increase the rate of pupils' progress further and raise standards to the necessary level. Teachers share the aims of the lesson with the pupils but these are too general and more often than not describe the activity the pupils are to do rather than the intended learning outcomes of the lesson. This makes it difficult for teachers and pupils to measure how successful they have been.

Good progress has been made in setting up systems to record, track and evaluate pupils' performance. The school's assessment and tracking system is now providing the information needed for better lesson planning and sharper monitoring and target setting by the school's leaders. Pupils are much more aware of their targets and teachers' expectations through the work of the ISP. These targets are given a high profile and are displayed around the classrooms and in pupils' books. However, teachers' marking, while regular and supportive, is still not telling pupils clearly enough what they need to do to improve in the short term. Not enough attention is given to the recurring errors pupils make or addressing the obvious gaps in their knowledge.

Assessment evidence and analysis clearly demonstrate better achievement over the past year in English, mathematics and science. With improvements to subject leadership and staff confidence, science is a developing strength in the school. However, while on track to reach the targets set for them in English and mathematics, pupils in Year 6 are unlikely to achieve national averages.

Subject leadership is an improving aspect of the school's work. Good professional development training, common approaches and opportunities for regular monitoring are all leading to better leadership and clearer direction. Good work by a literacy consultant is providing effective subject leadership in English until the new subject leader takes up the post later in the year. However, there remains work to be done to embed these improvements and make their impact even greater across the school.

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

Yours sincerely



John Francis  
Additional Inspector