

15 July 2008

Mr J Conquest
The Headteacher
Woodland Middle School
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Dear Mr Conquest

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 2 July, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 December 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve pupils' achievement in English, particularly in writing;
- improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that lesson planning is more effective in promoting key skills and these are underpinned by assessment through activities designed to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of ability;
- improve the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum in order to judge its impact on pupils' achievement and ensure that statutory requirements are met fully.

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 school's data shows that there is satisfactory progress in improving pupils' literacy. This is confirmed by my scrutiny of pupils' work and visits to lessons. In addition, the data shows that while progress in mathematics is good, in some years there is not sufficient progress being made in reading. The same is true of science, though pupils in Year 8 are showing overall satisfactory progress since they joined the school.

The progress made has come about because the school's leaders have done a considerable amount of well-judged work to identify and improve the causes of the previous underachievement. There are now more regular assessments of pupils' learning and a means of tracking pupils' achievement has been developed. There is regular monitoring of pupils' work and of the quality of teaching. A thorough analysis of Year 6 school English tests has been carried out showing, class by class, what pupils' strengths and weaknesses are. The information has been given to teachers and advice given, where necessary, on how to overcome the weaknesses. The school's monitoring has shown that the work is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. There are now clear guidelines showing what constitutes good teaching. The school has made use of local authority (LA) consultants and an advanced skills teacher to help enhance teaching skills. In addition, coaching has been provided by one of the school's deputy headteachers. Evidence from this visit confirms the school's own evaluation that teaching is improving. There are now more lessons in which the teaching is good, or has good features, than at the time of the inspection.

Planning is better, though some plans are too ambitious and do not allow enough time for the completion of all the activities or to consolidate and assess learning. Pupils' different abilities are still not sufficiently taken into account in the tasks they are given. However, there is much greater sharing with pupils what they are expected to be able to do as a result of the lessons. Marking, while still too variable in quality, is mostly helpful to pupils. In some cases, however, it is too detailed and contains more advice than the pupil can reasonably deal with. Pupils' knowledge of what they need to do to improve their work is better than it was. It has been developed through marking, and also through the production of target sheets, though these are not available in all subjects at the time that pupils need them, for example, when they are planning a piece of written work.

There is now a much greater emphasis on the development of writing. The teaching of aspects of writing is now a part of the work in all subjects. For example, report writing is taught in science. Subjects are also required to develop specific skills, such as the evaluation of work in design and technology lessons. The planning for next years Year 7 and 8 work has extensive promotion of a wide variety of skills.

The curriculum has been evaluated and changes put into place for September. Evaluation of pupils' learning in English has revealed the disadvantage of teaching some aspects of the subject at one time in the year only, with limited subsequent reinforcement. Discontinuities in the learning of design technology, because of the carousel arrangements with another subject, have been identified. Both of these defects have now been removed from the timetable for next year. Imbalances in the amount of time different subjects receive have also been ironed out. The school has reviewed its curriculum and has found that it meets statutory requirements.

The local authority is providing satisfactory support. A school improvement group has been established with members of the governing body. This meets frequently to monitor the progress which is being made. A parent champion has been appointed.

In addition, support from an advanced skills teacher, who has provided training, and from local authority subject consultants have provided effective support for improving teaching and for the management of behaviour. The local authority's action plan for the school is satisfactory.

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

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector