

18 June 2008

Mrs C Oldham
Headteacher
Bell Lane Primary (J and I) School
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Dear Mrs Oldham

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 June 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would like also to thank the chair of governors for the discussion we had and the pupils I met, who were all very welcoming and helpful.

Since the inspection of May 2007 there have been some significant staff changes. New teachers have been appointed to Years 1 and 2 and to some classes in Years 3 to 6. Children's attainment on entry to the Nursery fluctuates, but currently it is in line with the expected level for the children's age.

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As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 May 2007, the school was asked to do the following.

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching, including the use of assessment information, so that all pupils, and particularly higher attainers, make at least good progress.
- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously monitor and evaluate pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning to obtain a clear view of the improvements required.

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.

The inspection in May 2007 reported on standards and achievement at the end of

Year 6 in 2006. In that year, pupils reached average standards, which represented satisfactory achievement. In 2007 standards fell to below average largely because too few pupils in Year 6 reached or exceeded the nationally expected levels in writing. Furthermore, the progress made by pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 in 2007 was weak in English and science. Since then the school has worked hard, with some success, to make the necessary improvements in English, mathematics and science. In all this, the local authority has provided good assistance to the school. Current standards in Year 6 appear better than they were in 2007 because pupils have become more confident in sentence construction, spelling and punctuation. In science pupils are more successful at reflecting on what they have learned from their investigations, which has quickened their progress.

Efforts to improve teaching, for example in Year 6, are steadily raising standards and improving achievement, but gaps in knowledge caused by previous variations in the quality of teaching prevent more rapid progress in pupils' learning. Teaching in general benefits from more precise assessment of pupils' work. As a result, lessons are now better planned to meet the needs of all pupils, although there is still not always enough challenge for the most able. Plans for learning now usefully include objectives that are shared with pupils, and progress towards them is discussed at the end of lessons. A great deal of effort has gone into providing consistent advice for pupils, for example advice displayed on classroom walls. In every room there are helpful hints such as how to compose stylish sentences with adventurous vocabulary. These displays are already having a positive influence on pupils' learning. Progress in many lessons is now relatively brisk, but as improvements to the quality of learning have been comparatively recent this has not had time to produce good achievement by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

The headteacher and staff have developed some valuable methods of gathering information and evaluating it to help to raise standards. Progress is now closely tracked and checked against targets set for all pupils. The leadership team observes lessons regularly and disseminates the findings in a generalised way to all staff. Pupils' work is studied to provide evidence of improvement and triggers for further progress. Teachers' planning is analysed and useful feedback is given. These systems to check and evaluate the work of the school are well conceived, but have not been established for long enough to have had more than a satisfactory impact on standards. The chair of governors attends meetings with the school improvement partner to gain an overview of improvements in pupils' progress since May 2007. However, governors in general do not yet play a full role in finding out for themselves how the school could do even better in the pursuit of higher standards and raised achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Roger Gill
Additional inspector