

9 July 2008

Mrs T Parr
Acting Headteacher
Witton Church Walk CE Primary School
Church Walk
Northwich
Cheshire
CW9 5QQ

Dear Mrs Parr

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 July 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the governors, parents and pupils who gave their time to talk to me during the day.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 June 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve the monitoring of pupils' performance and stop underachievement
- improve teaching and learning
- improve the leadership and management of subjects.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

Since the inspection the school suffered two significant setbacks. First, the results of the national end of Key Stage 2 tests in 2007 were disappointing, especially in mathematics and science. The school's added value from Year 2 to Year 6 appeared very low, among the lowest in the country. The second setback occurred when the headteacher, whose work was praised in the inspection report, became unexpectedly and seriously ill. Although you had only recently been appointed deputy headteacher, you were appointed acting headteacher in December 2007.

At the time of my visit the Year 6 pupils had taken the national end of Key Stage 2 tests for 2008 but the results were not yet available. The school's records of pupils' progress indicate that results in mathematics should be broadly average this year and that science remains below average. Records of past performance show that the

present Year 6 cohort is a low attaining cohort, and recorded the lowest standards for several years when they were seven-years-old. Since present records indicate these pupils have done better than the 2007 cohort, which was a high performing cohort at age seven, they are judged to have made good progress, a judgement backed up by your internal assessments. Scrutiny of data about children's levels of development on entry suggests that the majority of children entering the Foundation Stage are working at levels below those expected for their age. This data should be taken into account when judging the subsequent progress these children make.

Progress in tackling underachievement in English and mathematics has been significantly supported by the school's involvement with the local authority's (LA's) literacy and numeracy consultants. The implementation of a national improvement programme, the Intensifying Support Programme (ISP), has been successful. In particular, it has ensured that teachers of each year group are fully aware of the need for their pupils to make the required progress over the year and that teachers appreciate that high standards at Year 6 can only be achieved by consistent good progress in each class. In order to check that pupils are on target, class teachers and subject leaders have adopted a rigorous testing regime that effectively meets the first of the key issues from the inspection: to improve the monitoring of pupils' progress. The school makes good use of the assessment information to provide catch-up programmes for pupils who fall behind and more challenging work for pupils who make accelerated progress.

The teaching and learning observed during the visit was of good quality. In Key Stage 2, where pupils' progress has given most concern, teaching was characterised by good relationships between staff and pupils, consistent management of behaviour and high expectations of pupils. The work pupils were doing was exciting. It was carefully and imaginatively planned so that key skills were acquired and practised in a relevant and practical way. For example, on the week of the visit lessons for all classes were planned around the theme of gardens. In an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson pupils browsed websites looking for information on particularly fine gardens, and in a design and technology lesson younger pupils designed and made models of domestic pets. In Reception children chose to assemble bird feeders from a wide range of materials as they talked with their teacher about the activity. Pupils show clear enjoyment of their work. They are very positive about the school, as are parents, and can think of little they would change.

The curriculum is under review. To some extent, this is to prepare for changes at a national level, such as the introduction of new requirements for children in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception). Otherwise, subject leaders are actively developing practice in their subjects. In science, for example, a new scheme of work enables teachers to make regular assessments of pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding. A close examination of test results has thrown up convincing evidence that pupils' skills in carrying out investigations are a weakness and that this is a major reason why standards in science are below average. The school is now considering ways to ensure that pupils have more time to conduct experiments and investigations. This work indicates that subject leadership is improving and such evidence is not confined to science. The school was able to provide subject leader's files to cover all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, and

other aspects of the curriculum, such as personal, social, health and citizenship education. The work of subject leaders is consistently well organised and often of high quality, such as in English (literacy) and ICT. The files provided evidence of subject leaders' overviews of their subjects, including how well they are planned and taught and of pupils' standards.

The clear progress that is being made to address the issues for improvement is particularly noteworthy in the context of the setbacks the school has faced. There is substantial evidence to suggest that the whole school community, including the governing body, has risen to meet the challenges the school faces and is providing you with good support. You have earned the confidence of teachers and parents in the role of acting headteacher. In addition to providing the ISP, the LA engaged the services of an experienced local headteacher to give you extra practical support, and the Diocese has also registered its willingness to help should this be needed. We discussed one or two points relating to the school's self-evaluation form and improvements to the school's development plan, but these were relatively minor points and do not detract from your success in moving the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector