

03 October 2008

Mr P Hopkinson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hopkinson

### Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when my colleague Amraz Ali HMI and I inspected your school on 2 October 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. I am also grateful to the pupils and parents who spoke with us.

The school's context has improved since the previous inspection in March 2008, in that there is a more settled staff team. The senior team is more established in its strategic role, though some middle leaders are inexperienced and a vacancy for an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader remains to be filled. Building work to enlarge the school currently restricts space for physical education, but the school is running smoothly.

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As a result of the inspection in March 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science throughout the school
- improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that tasks are closely matched to the differing needs of pupils, to accelerate their progress.

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.

Standards remain well below the national average, but have risen in Key Stage 2. Attainment on entry to the EYFS is low overall, with evidence of weak communication skills, not only for the number who are at an early stage of learning

English as an additional language. Suitable strategies to address this ensure children move on to work securely within the early learning goals. These strategies include a clearly evident emphasis on personal, social and emotional development and speaking and listening. Moderated assessment indicates that children achieved in line with children in similar schools in 2008. By the end of EYFS, 42% reached the level expected for their age overall and in all areas of communication, language and literacy (CLLD) and personal and social development (PSED). This was close to the target of 46%. Children achieve in line with expectations in linking sounds and letters, but inspectors' observation, as well as the patterns evident in children's scores, indicates weaknesses in other aspects of CLLD crucial to the development of reading and writing.

Over the past five years to 2007, Key Stage 1 test results have shown a slight improving trend from a very low level, except in reading. This trend was not sustained in 2008, mainly because reading levels dipped further. On the positive side, although attainment in writing is below average, it rose a little in some respects. Standards in mathematics are in line with the national average. However, the school's progress tracking shows that the number of pupils working below age-related expectations did not decrease sufficiently during Year 2.

There has been some limited improvement in attainment and achievement at Key Stage 2. Historically, results in national tests have fluctuated, but remained far below the average, leading the school to be classified as 'hard to shift'. Achievement in Key Stage 2 has been very low with no clear trend of improvement. Against this background, provisional results from Key Stage 2 national tests in 2008 show an improved picture in standards and achievement. Results in the core subjects are substantially higher than in 2007, though they remain below the school's targets. For the first time, a pupil reached Level 5 in both reading and writing. However, results in English are far below the target, mostly because of pupils' weak writing skills. Attainment at Level 4 for pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the average for Sheffield in all subjects. The proportion making two levels progress between Year 3 and Year 6 improved in both English and mathematics compared with the previous year, but remains below the national average. The school's tracking system shows that the number of pupils working below age-related expectations did not decrease far enough in Year 6. Interventions have not consistently had the effect the school hoped for on targeted groups of pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make steady progress, but boys as a group continue to make less progress than girls.

These limited improvements have resulted from the emerging impact of professional development on a more settled teaching team. Support has been focused appropriately on matching work to the differing needs of pupils to accelerate their progress. In this respect, no unsatisfactory teaching was seen and a minority was good, broadly confirming the school's self-evaluation of modest progress since the previous inspection. Relationships are positive across the school. Teachers show a heightened awareness of where pupils struggle, well supported by the local authority's programme to improve learning for pupils with English as an additional

language (EAL). However, the overall quality of teaching, though it has improved, has some way to go before it will raise standards significantly.

The quality of provision in EYFS remains satisfactory. Structured phonic learning, opportunities for families to be involved in their children's learning and strategies to develop speaking and listening are used effectively with children from all backgrounds. However, some crucial reading and writing skills are not developed effectively enough.

In Key Stage 1, class teachers vary in the effectiveness with which they manage integrated learning, so that opportunities for learning are not consistently maximised. Sometimes, challenge is lacking, for example, when tasks are too easy for some pupils and adults miss the opportunity to extend them. In another example, a plenary failed to assess or consolidate learning effectively because it did not draw together the disparate activities which pupils had been engaged in.

In Key Stage 2, greater continuity of teaching is producing dividends. Strategies for improving writing are applied with some confidence and imagination. Teachers give clear explanations and use good quality resources such as books and computers to help pupils explore, visualise and articulate their ideas. Pupils write for a variety of progressively challenging purposes. Interesting experiences, including reading, are well linked to writing. Pupils' books show some progress over the past year in the length and organisation of writing, and the ability to write appropriately for different purposes. Pupils show a fairly clear idea of what counts as good writing for a particular genre. However, writing skills are well below average and improvement is patchy. Teachers' marking too often gives pupils little useful guidance about how to improve.

The level of challenge overall is satisfactory, though there is scope to increase it, especially for the most able, and to fine-tune interventions to maximise their impact on targeted pupils. In the better lessons seen, good teamwork between the class teacher and assistants with expertise in community languages or specific disabilities or learning difficulties means all contribute to accelerating learning throughout the lesson. But on some occasions, support was underutilised: for example, in a plenary, adults contributed little to supporting participation or assessment of learning.

The local authority (LA)'s support for the school has been considerable over a long period, and continues. However, this has not yet produced the improvement anticipated. The LA statement of action addressed the priorities for improvement, set challenging targets and appropriate support to reach them, but lacked sufficient clear milestones to aid evaluation of the school's progress. Support has had some positive impact, despite some difficulties linked to LA restructuring. The long standing involvement with the intensified support programme, and the more recent APPEAL programme focused on the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language, have had some positive effect on: the tracking of pupils' progress; target-setting; differentiating learning and the use of talk to promote learning. Consultants, including the Regional Adviser for the Primary National Strategy, have

provided suitably targeted support for teachers. This has contributed to improved planning and more accurate assessment, though more remains to be done across the school. A learning partnership with a local school, now concluded, provided mentoring for newly qualified teachers who all successfully concluded their induction. A range of support continues this year. As a school with very low attainment, the school became part of Sheffield Challenge in September, and expects soon to have one day a week of advisory teacher support.

Under the leadership of an experienced headteacher, the school is proactive in identifying support for its well understood needs. Term-by-term plans to raise attainment are supported by a coherent programme of professional development and staff are informed about both. There are developing arrangements for evaluating the impact of initiatives, making increasingly good use of data. The school's leadership team undertakes regular monitoring and provides useful feedback to staff. There are some signs of improvement in outcomes and quality of provision. Overall, there is a clear sense of direction and the means to achieve this.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles  
Her Majesty's Inspector