

26 September 2008

Mrs Ann Laws
Acting Headteacher
Broom Cottages Primary School
Broom Cottages
Ferryhill
County Durham
DL17 8AN

Dear Mrs Laws

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 25 September 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 pupils, staff and governors for speaking with me during the day.

Since the February 2008 inspection a number of important changes have occurred. The acting headteacher (substantive deputy headteacher) continues to lead the school in the absence of the headteacher. She is supported by an acting deputy headteacher and a recently retired headteacher from another school within the local authority (LA). The senior leadership team has been extended to include coordinators for literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) and the Foundation Stage leader. Four teachers left the school at the end of the summer term, including one retirement. Three of the four teaching staff at Key Stage 1 joined the school in September 2008.

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

- Raise standards and improve the rate of pupils' progress so that they all achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure that curricular planning and organisation provide all pupils with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop basic literacy skills effectively.

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

Since the last inspection the school's senior leaders, with the support of the LA, have made important changes to the analysis and use of information about pupils'

performance. Pupils' work is assessed regularly, and on-going analysis provides accurate information about individual pupil and cohort performance. This enables staff to identify underachievement and to target additional help to those pupils who need it. It also leads to modifications to teachers' lesson plans and prompts changes to curriculum content where this is deemed necessary.

Evidence from workbooks and assessment files shows that in reading and mathematics pupils at Key Stage 1 are making improved rates of progress but standards remain below national average. Pupils' progress in writing continues to be weak, however, because the legacy of underachievement and poor writing skills hinders its development. A significant proportion of pupils do not achieve in line with their capabilities. At Key Stage 2 tracking information and work samples offer credible evidence that rates of progress are much improved and that standards are higher than at the time of the inspection, particularly in mathematics and reading but less so in writing.

Staff are working hard to overcome these weaknesses and much has changed for the better since the inspection. Teachers use assessment information well when lessons are planned, with most demonstrating appropriate expectations of pupils' capabilities. The majority of lesson activities are carefully matched to pupils' learning needs, offering challenge and motivation. The curriculum has been re-organised to provide a secure emphasis on tackling weaknesses in pupils' basic skills. At Key Stage 1, for example, this has involved a significant investment in additional staff to allow focused, small group work and personalised support for individual pupils. This is helping pupils to gain confidence and sustain progress in their learning. Teachers are providing regular opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills in other curriculum areas through a creative use of time and by securing clear links between subjects when possible. These changes are combining to make an increasingly positive difference to pupils' achievements.

The LA rightly acknowledged a declining trend in the school's performance prior to the inspection and put in place a series of measures to support the school to tackle identified weaknesses. This included the appointment of an experienced and successful headteacher (now retired) and a team of consultants to work alongside the acting headteacher and the staff. The governing body has received support to strengthen its monitoring role in holding the school to account for its performance. These measures have been successful in developing the expertise and confidence of the school's leadership team, staff and governors and have made an important contribution to the improvements which are now evident.

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

Yours sincerely
Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector