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Mrs Sally Whitlow
The Headteacher
Princes Risborough Primary School
Wellington Avenue
Princes Risborough
HP27 9HY

Dear Mrs Whitlow

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 1 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also extend my thanks to the pupils who spoke to me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 1 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- In conjunction with the local authority, secure, as a matter of urgency, improved provision for pupils within the social communication difficulties department by appointing suitably qualified and permanent teaching staff.
- Improve assessment systems so that teachers build accurately and more rapidly on pupils' existing skills.
- Improve the curriculum so that it increases pupils' enjoyment and progress, and so that it provides planned opportunities for pupils' cultural development.
- Ensure teaching is underpinned by agreed whole-school strategies for improving pupils' skills and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure leaders at all levels evaluate accurately the work of the school and pursue improvement relentlessly and rigorously.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement. This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school and I am recommending a return visit.

Evidence, including school data, lesson observations and pupil workbooks suggests there are some improvements in standards. The majority of pupils are making satisfactory progress. Pupils in Year 6 and in the social communication difficulties

department are doing comparatively well, but the legacy of underachievement is still evident in the slow progress made by pupils in other year groups.

Provision in the social communication difficulties department has improved primarily because of the input from the local authority (LA). The school has been successful in appointing a permanent member of teaching staff and has been creative in securing a second, temporary appointment. Accommodation and resources issues have been addressed and the focus now is on pupils' learning. As a result of external advice, senior leaders now have a more realistic view of the department's strengths and weaknesses, and an understanding of what needs to be improved. They have begun to act on local authority advice, for example, in ensuring activities are practical and visual cues are used to support pupils' learning. Although progress in this area is satisfactory, much remains to be done. Crucially, senior leaders must ensure staff receive appropriate training to ensure the needs of all pupils are met more consistently.

The school recognises that in the past weaker teaching has been the cause of pupils' underachievement. Whole staff training has been delivered on teaching and learning and the headteacher has forged links with local schools in order to promote better practice in this area. LA consultants are now providing additional support to teachers. However, although teaching is satisfactory overall, it remains variable. The school's self-evaluation notes that there is still some inadequate teaching and that there is insufficient good or better teaching. In order to address the significant gaps in pupils' learning and ensure pupils make the progress of which they are capable, particularly in writing, teaching needs to be of a higher quality. Some teachers are beginning to match work more accurately to the ability of their pupils, although expectations in some classes remain too low. Teaching assistants are well briefed and usually provide valuable support for pupils working in small groups.

In some lessons pupils make inadequate progress because the teaching is uninspiring. In these lessons, pupils spend too long just sitting and listening. As a result they either struggle or coast.

The school has recognised the need to give greater focus to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematical skills and there are appropriate plans for more intervention in order to raise standards. However, these plans are at a very early stage of implementation and the impact to date is limited.

Assessment data is not used sharply enough to identify strengths and weaknesses across the school. The performance of different groups is not analysed in the depth necessary to ensure school improvement actions are prioritised. Although, the school is now setting targets in reading, writing and mathematics for each cohort and collecting better quality information on individual pupils' progress, teachers are not using this consistently enough to plan lessons that address individual pupils' needs. As a result, achievement is not rising quickly enough. Many pupils are not aware of the level they are working at, do not know their targets and do not know what they need to do to improve. The quality of marking remains variable; some marking is regular and encouraging, but generally marking does not provide pupils with sufficient guidance on how to improve. Additionally, identified areas for improvement are not followed up in subsequent marking. In the Foundation Stage, staff are beginning to assess and record children's progress conscientiously.

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving the curriculum with increased opportunities to develop cultural development, for example, by introducing themed weeks and stories from different cultures. There have been recent efforts to make work more meaningful and exciting, for example by linking different subjects, but these have not yet had an impact on pupils' learning. Lesson observations indicate increased opportunities for pupils to enjoy developing their skills through practical tasks, particularly in Key Stage 1, but pupils are at times disinterested in lessons in Key Stage 2.

Senior leaders have effectively ensured that pupils work in a calm and tidy environment. Although progress has been made since the last inspection in some areas, little has been accomplished in others. Weaknesses in senior leadership and management have been compounded by inaccurate self-evaluation. Monitoring lacks rigour and does not sufficiently evaluate the impact of the school's work on pupils' learning. The quality of teaching, learning and the progress the pupils are making is not rigorously checked. A new lesson observation format has been adopted. However, this is not consistently used. Additionally, the majority of lesson observations do not focus sharply on pupils' learning and do not always comment sufficiently on the progress of pupils of differing prior attainment. As a result, senior leaders' view of the school remains too optimistic. Systems are being developed to manage the data from tests but there is more to do to analyse the information gained and to use it to identify what needs to be improved. The assessment co-ordinator needs more support for this work.

Governors do not have a clear understanding of the governing body's role in holding the school to account for its work. The majority of governors have not attended any training to develop their roles in evaluating the work of the school. Consequently, they are not well placed to challenge the school and governance of the school remains weak.

The LA has provided satisfactory support to the school. It has produced a satisfactory statement of action which sets clear timelines and is explicit about how progress is to be measured.

Although the school has made satisfactory progress in some areas, significant weaknesses remain in the key areas of assessment, teaching and leadership. Overall the school has made inadequate progress in addressing the points for improvement.

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria
Her Majesty's Inspector