

7 November 2008

Mr H Wood  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wood

### Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 06 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful to the staff and pupils who spoke with me.

The school's context has changed little since the previous inspection in February 2008. However, three newly qualified teachers have successfully completed their induction periods and staffing has been stable. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) now occupies a newly refurbished unit within the school. The 'soft federation' with another local school continues to develop, with an executive headteacher for both schools and one governor common to both governing bodies. This arrangement is in place until August 2009, and the local authority (LA) and governors are at the early stages of investigating the possibility of a more long term partnership or hard federation with another successful school.

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

- improve pupils' achievements and raise standards in English, mathematics and science at both key stages
- work with families to improve attendance to bring it in line with national averages
- improve the quality of teaching so learning and achievement are consistently good or better.

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.

Although there have been some improvements at both Key Stages 1 and 2, standards remain well below the national average. Attainment on entry to the EYFS is very low overall: children have weak communication, mathematical and social skills. Foundation Stage profile assessments indicate that generally, children attain well below those in other schools locally and nationally by the end of the EYFS. In 2008, less than a quarter of children reached the level expected for their age. Nonetheless, for the third consecutive year, assessments show continued improvements in the areas of communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development.

At Key Stage 1, over the past five years to 2007, test results have varied but have been low in all subjects. In 2008, the school achieved its best ever Key Stage 1 results; however, attainment remains below average in all subjects. Of particular note are improvements in reading, where the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2 or above increased and was close to the local average. Standards in writing and mathematics, although improved, remain below national averages.

At Key Stage 2 there have been some improvements. Results in national tests have, historically, been far below average, leading the school to be classified as 'hard to shift'. The 2008 unvalidated results indicate that standards remain well below average in all reported subjects with 50% of pupils attaining Level 4 or above in English. However, the school's data show that, in reaching this level, an impressive 93% of pupils improved by two full levels over the course of the key stage. In mathematics this figure was 55% and, although an improvement on previous years, this remains too low.

The school has set aspirational targets of a whole level increase each year for all pupils across the school. However, few reached these targets in 2008. The school's progress tracking shows that the number of pupils working below age-related expectations across the school is too high. This reflects some long-standing underachievement, particularly in writing and mathematics. Interventions have been effective for the large number of pupils who have been identified for additional support. This often takes the form of regular one-to-one support from the recently established 'intervention team' or special needs coordinator. Their data and tracking show some good gains, particularly in reading and phonics. However, these improvements are not yet reflected in the classroom work and exercise books of some pupils.

Ongoing support and development of the now settled teaching force is evident in the fact that teaching is improving. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during this visit and a healthy proportion was good, confirming the school's self-evaluation of progress since the previous inspection. Support has been focused appropriately on the development of newly and recently qualified teachers and on matching work to

the differing needs of pupils to accelerate their progress. However, on occasion, some pupils, particularly the lower attaining, are still finding work too challenging. Relationships are positive across the school and there are clear expectations of pupils' behaviour which ensure that classrooms are calm, orderly and purposeful. Teachers give clear explanations and use good quality resources such as interactive whiteboards to help and motivate pupils. Pupils write for a variety of purposes and interesting experiences, such as bonfire night are used to inspire writing. Pupils' books show some progress in the length and organisation of writing, and the ability to write appropriately for different purposes. Older pupils have a fairly clear idea of what counts as good writing. However, writing skills are well below average and improvement is patchy, particularly for some lower ability pupils. Mathematics books similarly show some progress over time and cover an appropriate range of mathematical topics. Although some good examples of marking were observed, teachers' marking is inconsistent in providing all pupils with useful guidance about how to improve. Whilst the overall quality of teaching has improved, it has not yet impacted on the standards and progress of all pupils across the school. This is primarily due to the legacy of considerable underachievement but also because inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching. Additionally, some of the school's strategies for improvement are too new to see sustained gains.

The school's work to improve rates of attendance has had some limited impact but there remains much to do. There is some evidence of improved engagement with parents through, for example, the use of coffee mornings and parents' reading sessions. However, the attendance rate in the academic year up to September 2008 remains too low. There have been some limited reductions in the numbers of pupils who arrive late and in those who take time off to attend medical appointments. Now, for example, instead of taking a whole day off, they are taking only a half day or leaving and returning to school.

The LA's support for the school has been considerable over a long period, and this continues. The LA's statement of action addresses the priorities for improvement, sets challenging targets with appropriate support to reach them and contains sufficient clear milestones to aid evaluation of the school's progress. However, although there has been some positive impact, this has not yet produced all of the improvement anticipated. An advisory teacher is currently working with some of the older pupils to boost their mathematical skills.

Under the leadership of the executive headteacher and the leadership team the school has effectively improved provision within the EYFS along with strengthening the quality of teaching. Termly plans to raise attainment are supported by an appropriate programme of professional development. The leadership team undertakes regular monitoring, provides useful feedback to staff, and develops individual support plans for all teachers. This has helped to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching. Overall, there is a clear sense of direction and plans to achieve this; however, there is, as yet, still a gap between improvements in provision and its discernable impact on progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali  
Her Majesty's Inspector