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12 November 2008

Mrs Kathryn Ellidge
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ellidge

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 11 November 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 Year 6 pupils, staff and chair of governors for their warm welcome and willingness to talk with 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.

Since the inspection in March 2008 there have been significant changes in staffing and in the organisation of the teaching of pupils. Several members of staff left the school at the end of the summer term. The pupils in Key Stage 2 are now being taught as separate year groups and the four class teachers were all new to the school from September. One has been seconded to the school for three terms to take on the role of Key Stage 2 leader. Two teachers are newly qualified and are being mentored by senior managers from a partner primary school. The chair of governors took up the role in September 2008.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 March 2008, the school was asked to improve pupils' achievement and raise standards in English, mathematics and science; use information from assessment consistently to plan the next steps in pupils' learning so that they are appropriately challenged and make good progress; and ensure that subject leaders rigorously monitor the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' achievements.

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.

After a summer term of inconsistent response from members of staff to guidance and professional training, the school is off to a stronger start this term. As stated in the report from the inspection in March, the school 'is heading in the right direction'. It has all the necessary systems and procedures to inform teaching and learning, to track pupils' progress and to evaluate the impact of what it does. The headteacher, staff, pupils and parents remarked on the positive change in atmosphere within the school and how this is 'helping us to learn better' (Year 6 pupil). New staff have strengthened the pool of teaching skills and there is an evident wish to share ideas, to support one another and ensure that pupils do the best they can.

There is some evidence to indicate that pupils are achieving better than they were and that standards are starting to rise. The picture remains mixed although the increased focus on mathematics, letters and sounds, writing, experiences to motivate the boys and to challenge the more able, is reflected in some higher test results and in the school's evidence of pupils' progress. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2, having tasted fruit in the Caribbean café and talked about their experiences, wrote quite lengthy accounts drawing on their knowledge of letters and sounds to spell new words. For some pupils, this was a real move forward.

Standards remain below average. The school's unvalidated data from teacher assessments and national tests in the summer of 2008 indicate that overall standards rose slightly at Key Stage 2. Compared with 2007, results were markedly higher in mathematics where, for the first time, two out of three pupils reached Level 4, the level expected for their age. Although a small number of pupils attained the higher Level 5 in mathematics, English and science, the school fell far short of its targets for attainment at Levels 4 and 5.

At Key Stage 1, the results were slightly lower than in 2007, keeping standards below average. The boys did not do as well as they should in reading and writing; however, they outshone the girls in mathematics. Overall, the pupils of Pakistani heritage did well when compared with similar pupils nationally.

The school is generally on track to meet its lower targets for 2009. Pupils' work in books and responses in lessons indicate that many pupils are working at or close to the level expected for their age. The school has analysed pupils' progress over the last school year and organised support programmes in reading and mathematics to boost the learning of those pupils who did not move on enough. There are now daily sessions in phonic work (letters and sounds) for all pupils with some setting to ensure individual needs are met. The youngest pupils are progressing well. They recognised some letters, blended their sounds and identified simple words. Older pupils' work showed a common strength in accurate spelling and use of basic punctuation and Year 6 pupils had used some interesting phrases in their poems about emotions. Pupils generally pick up well on procedures. Year 4 pupils identified aspects of fair testing in science, and Year 5 pupils cottoned on to the strategy of rounding up numbers to make subtraction easier. However, in both cases, the responses of some pupils showed that they were not relating the procedure to the

context nor had secure subject knowledge. Pupils are willing learners and want to do well although their excitement led in some lessons to impetuous, incorrect responses and misconceptions. On a couple of occasions, this was clearly linked to a superficial understanding of key words and phrases. The school is aware from an analysis of pupils' test results that this weakness, most particularly for pupils who have English as an additional language, results in errors in mathematics and science. Classroom displays include key vocabulary related to topics but there is scope for the staff to share ideas in how to make best use of these displays, how to question pupils to probe their understanding and how to get them to explain their thinking.

There is the potential for the quality of teaching and learning to strengthen. New members of staff have found their feet; classrooms are well organised and the school has bright, attractive displays to interest the pupils and celebrate their work. The adults take every opportunity to praise and encourage the pupils. Less experienced staff are benefiting from guidance from senior managers as well as mentors from the partner school. Support staff have their own day books and the teachers are drawing on their comments about pupils' responses when they plan lessons. The teachers know what they want the pupils to learn but they do not always provide the best tasks and support material to ensure that all pupils learn well. Not all the adults are equally skilled in breaking the learning down into small enough steps to ensure pupils realise how the process hangs together. As a result, some pupils find it hard to complete the tasks. The school has correctly identified that there are too many examples of unfinished and poorly presented work in pupils' books.

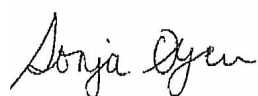
The school now has a clear picture of each pupil's level of attainment and there is an expectation that all pupils will make at least average progress. However, there is some way to go to ensure that individual pupils are working to their full potential. The school has yet to identify those pupils who have underachieved and who need to make good progress to keep in line, and those pupils who learn slowly but are working to the best of their ability. As part of the assessment of pupils' progress, chances have been missed to attribute a level to pieces of writing and to identify what pupils need to do to improve. Some of the older pupils relate improvement only to neatness and accuracy.

Subject leadership is strengthening and there is a clear focus on pupils' academic progress as well as the very strong attention to their pastoral care and wellbeing. Changes in leadership this term have not delayed action unduly and management time is being used to monitor provision. The leaders in mathematics and science have a sound overview of where weaknesses lie but it is too early to evaluate the impact of their work on pupils' achievements. The deputy headteacher has given a good lead in English. She has a clear view of what worked well last school year and is setting the tone in her work with the youngest pupils. Her report to the governing body included key information on pupils' progress in all year groups and the impact of action. It is not clear from the minutes of recent meetings of the governing body that governors have drawn on such information to evaluate the school's progress in meeting the targets in the action plan.

The headteacher is right to comment that 'we have run a marathon in seven weeks'. The files of evidence confirm her view that staff have worked hard since the start of this term to root the work started in the summer term. The need to repeat some of the training given by consultants from the local authority gives an opportunity to tailor the content even more closely to the school's needs, especially in developing effective subject teaching and refining subject leaders' skills in monitoring the quality of provision and evaluating its impact. The school has had good support from the local authority. The headteacher has also worked with the diocese to upgrade the school environment and ensure stable staffing for this school year. She has sought and acted on advice, been assiduous in following the action plan and taken a firm line when her expectations of staff have not been met. Much of the action to date has been to establish procedures and update knowledge. Senior managers realise they have to increase the pace of the school's progress in order to iron out inconsistencies in practice, strengthen the quality of teaching and chip away at the areas of weakness in pupils' skills and knowledge.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sonja Øyen'.

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector