

26 November 2008

Mrs M Duffy
Headteacher
Blenheim Primary School
Lofthouse Place
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS2 9EX

Dear Mrs Duffy

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 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to thank the school improvement adviser for giving time to meet with me, and the pupils for being so welcoming and speaking with me so openly.

Since the inspection in April 2008, a new Foundation Stage leader took up post in May. There has also been a change of teacher for the Year 2 class. Six new teaching assistants started work in September and they are all receiving training as part of the local authority's support for the school. The number of children in the Foundation Stage has increased significantly and the Reception class is now full.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of work in the Foundation Stage to enable all children to achieve well
- increase the rate of progress made by all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, especially across Years 3 to 6
- raise the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school
- improve the quality of marking so that pupils have a better understanding of how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

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

Standards in Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics had increased significantly to broadly average between 2006 and 2007 and the inspection report in April 2008 indicated that pupils' achievement in Key Stage 1 was good. This improvement in reading, writing and mathematics was maintained in 2008. In Key Stage 2, standards in 2007 were only slightly below the national average and pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 was satisfactory. However, in 2008, provisional results in Key Stage 2 national tests showed a significant fall in standards. The provisional results indicate that these pupils did not do as well as expected by the end of Year 6 and that their achievement was below average for pupils with similar starting points. However, that particular group of pupils, including a few with serious behaviour problems, had a history of underachievement over previous years. The school's current tracking data show that, as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching for Year 6, these pupils actually made much better progress during their final year in school.

The new Foundation Stage leader has worked quickly to implement many necessary changes. The learning environment is now much better, especially the display, with its new emphasis on developing language, together with the improved arrangement and accessibility of equipment. The new area for parents is valuable in enabling staff to exchange information and forge important links. A caring, supportive atmosphere is securely established and children have settled well. Each child's link with a key person, notably at milk time when a 'family group' situation enables learning to continue in a slightly different context is a welcome improvement. The balance of activities that are directed by adults and those chosen by the child is better, though some children still lack initiative in selecting and pursuing their own interests. The teaching of phonics is developing well and there is a greater emphasis on understanding numbers. The Foundation Stage leader is aware that there is still work to be done, notably in the use of detailed assessment to plan the next activities for individual children. Nevertheless, basic assessment procedures are in place and indicate that children are now making better progress in the Foundation Stage.

Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' written work during the monitoring visit confirm that pupils are now making better progress in Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, there are still some variations in their progress. For example, pupils' progress in writing is a strength, whereas their progress in mathematics, although generally satisfactory, is less consistent. This improvement in progress is mainly the result of better teaching but there are also other factors at work. The school's monitoring procedures are now used more effectively to identify where changes are needed. For example, the efforts to support lower attainers in literacy were not proving as successful as had been anticipated. Having identified this, the school quickly changed the strategy it was using and arranged further training for teaching assistants. In addition, the attendance of both pupils and staff has improved so pupils are more able to rely on consistency in teaching, and in the additional support they receive, and have a better chance of steadily building up their understanding.

At the April 2008 inspection, teaching and learning were judged to be generally satisfactory with some lessons being judged as good. Now all lessons have many

more good features. Lessons are consistently better planned with appropriate emphasis on meeting the needs of the various groups of pupils. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language generally make similar progress to that of others in the class. Teachers manage pupils better so that behaviour is improving. Pupils in Year 6 speak enthusiastically of the improvement in behaviour in recent months. Teachers face particular challenges when pupils join the class at various times throughout the year, sometimes with no knowledge of English and no experience of education in their home countries. Teachers are better at responding to this challenge, enabling these pupils to adapt more quickly to their new situation. Nevertheless, there are aspects of teaching that still require improvement, notably, in some lessons, ensuring that all groups are fully engaged in their learning. Teaching assistants are not always as quick to respond to pupils' needs as they should be and do not always use their time effectively to support learning.

Teachers now mark pupils' work more regularly and thoroughly. Year 6 pupils say how much they value the good advice they receive about how their work can be improved, both in the marking in their books and in the spoken feedback they receive from teachers. The very useful 'flaps' in pupils' books, which highlight pupils' individual targets for improving their writing, are not yet being used in mathematics and this is recognised as an area for further development.

The local authority's plan of action for the school is comprehensive and detailed. More importantly, the subsequent support provided has been very valuable with thorough, practical guidance and training, alongside rigorous monitoring. However, the major factor in moving the school forward has been the energy and determination of the headteacher, with support from other senior colleagues and governors, both in overcoming problems with staffing and accommodation, and in motivating staff so that they use the training they receive to make real improvements in the way pupils learn.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Harrison
Additional Inspector