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14 November 2008

Mr M Cassidy
Headteacher
Rabbsfarm Primary School
Gordon Road
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Dear Mr Cassidy

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 6 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the members of staff, pupils, chair of governors and school improvement partner who spoke with me. Their contributions were most helpful.

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 school was last inspected, there have been several changes in the teaching staff group. Four new teachers joined the school in September and others have changed the year groups that they are working with.

As a result of the inspection on 13 March 2008, the school was asked to focus on four main areas for improvement. They were: to improve pupils' standards and progress, particularly in English and science; to increase the proportion of good teaching and learning so that pupils build their skills consistently; to increase the involvement of senior staff in monitoring teaching and learning; and to improve attendance.

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.

The results of national tests and assessments have become available since the school was last inspected, although they are as yet unvalidated. There were small improvements in reading and mathematics at Key Stage 1, and a stronger improvement in writing, although this was from a very low base. The results

remained well below the local authority's average. The school met its target for results in English at Key Stage 2 but fell short of the target in mathematics. Results were low, and very few pupils reached higher levels. However, the local authority's analysis of the results suggests that the progress the pupils made across the key stage was broadly satisfactory, which will be an improvement on the previous year. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level in science was much smaller than the national figure and standards were very low. Senior staff are taking appropriate steps to raise standards and are doing so with some urgency. They have analysed the test results to pinpoint areas of particular weakness in all three subjects, and work is underway to plug the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills that the analysis revealed. Science is now taught for two and a half hours a week and a greater emphasis is being given to developing pupils' investigative skills, but standards are still well below those in English and mathematics. Challenging targets have been set for the current Year 6, particularly in science.

The school has comprehensive and informative systems that track pupils' progress and is well placed to intervene quickly if anyone falls behind. The school's data show that, over last year, progress in English and mathematics was inconsistent across the year groups, although most pupils made progress at the expected rate and some exceeded it. The inconsistency is being dealt with in two ways: by providing support and guidance to improve teaching and learning, and by raising teachers' expectations of the progress that pupils should make over the course of each year. Teachers are increasingly accountable for their pupils' progress. For example, they meet with senior staff to discuss the progress of individuals and to identify barriers to learning and strategies that will help them move on.

The school has a clear schedule for monitoring and evaluating its provision. It is quite a heavy programme and includes a number of different ways of checking on teaching and learning. This is appropriate given the stage the school is at in dealing with the areas for improvement. The outcomes of evaluation, together with the information from tracking pupils' progress, mean that the school now knows its strengths and areas that require further development. Records of observations of lessons show that there is a solid core of good teaching and the school is on track to meet its target. Lesson observations focus sensibly on checking that agreed whole-school approaches are being implemented. A personalised programme supports individual staff in meeting their professional development needs.

The work of the senior leadership team has improved considerably since the school was inspected. Phase leaders and the inclusion manager are playing a more effective part in monitoring and evaluating provision and in supporting members of staff in their teams. The senior leadership team shares a strong sense of purpose and a clear commitment to improvement. The membership of the governing body has been strengthened, governors are receiving training and are developing their understanding of how to both support the school and provide the necessary challenge.

Attendance levels are rising steadily and are in line with the average for the similar local schools. Punctuality is also being tackled successfully.

The school has maintained the strengths in pupils' personal development noted at the previous inspection. The pupils I spoke to were unequivocal about their enjoyment of school and that it is a friendly and safe place to be. 'The school teaches you to be nice to everyone', said the chair of the school council.

The school is receiving support from the local authority in line with what is set out in its action plan. This is contributing to the school's satisfactory progress. The work of the school improvement partner has been particularly useful. Members of staff also value highly the support that they are receiving from a local primary school, which was brokered by the local authority. Support from the local authority has been balanced with keeping a close eye on progress. The local authority's evaluations of how well the school is progressing are accurate, and the feedback provided to the school is helpful in showing what the next steps should be.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector