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10 December 2008

Mrs Rena Randall
Acting Headteacher
Red Barn Community Primary School
Linden Lea
Portchester
Fareham
PO16 8HJ

Dear Mrs Randall

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help that you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 December 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to staff and pupils.

The former headteacher took early retirement in July 2008. Since then, the deputy headteacher has been acting headteacher and the two key stage managers have been acting deputy headteachers. A chair has been seconded from another school to Chair the Governing Body at Red Barn. The school is aiming to appoint a new headteacher following interviews that are scheduled to take place in the same week as the monitoring visit.

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 12 and 13 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve achievement in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2
- improve the use of tracking and target setting to make sure that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress
- ensure that teaching takes greater account of pupils' prior learning and assessments, to promote good learning and achievement
- strengthen the effectiveness of the leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders so that they have a greater impact on pupils' achievement and standards.

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 quality of leadership and management of the school has considerably improved since the time of the last inspection. Senior leaders have been empowered to bring about changes, which have led to improved rates of learning. Pupils and parents speak positively about recent changes. Pupils enjoy their learning and have a better understanding of how well they are doing and what they could do better. Parents consider the school to be more welcoming and, as a result, have become more involved in their children's learning and the school community.

Recent unvalidated test results show that standards in 2008 rose considerably in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and these are now broadly in line with national averages. The school exceeded its targets for English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2, with pupils attaining above average standards in mathematics and science. However, standards in English, although improved, remain too low and too few pupils in both key stages attain the higher levels. The quality of writing is improving slowly, but progress across the school is too uneven. In some cases this is due to a legacy of underachievement, but at times this is also due to weaknesses in teaching. There are still too many missed opportunities from Reception to Year 6 for pupils to use and develop their writing skills across the curriculum. Even the dedicated phonics lessons do not all include a seamless progression from reading to writing in a way that enables pupils to apply their reading skills to help them to spell new and unfamiliar words.

Although the school is now tracking the progress made by every individual pupil and this information is reviewed every term, this is still not frequent enough to help teachers reflect on what they need to modify in their medium term plans so as to fill the gaps in pupils' learning and to accelerate their rate of progress. Pupils of lower ability who do not have special educational needs are progressing well due to the additional support they receive. However, there is insufficient tracking of the progress made by different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties and disabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies and ensure they are progressing as well as their peers. Teaching is, nonetheless, making better use of available data and assessment information and is taking better account of pupils' prior learning. The quality of daily lesson planning is too variable and is at times weak. Not all lessons are planned in a way that ensures the needs of all pupils are taken fully into account. Planning often lacks explicit reference to key vocabulary which generally leads to insufficient explicit teaching of new and at times more technical vocabulary, with teachers not ensuring that pupils understand or use new words with confidence during lessons. There are also insufficient planned opportunities for pupils to discuss their work and limited information about how the more able pupils could be further challenged.

There are pockets of good practice in the school and positive relationships between staff and pupils. In the vast majority of lessons, pupils were polite and very well behaved. Where teaching was most effective, pupils demonstrated a secure understanding of what was expected of them and the teacher checked their progress at regular intervals. Pupils typically made effective use of success criteria to enable them to judge how well they had progressed and what they had learnt. In a good Year 4 lesson, pupils used notes they had written in a previous lesson about the Tudors to produce good pieces of writing, some of which included complex sentences. Most teachers use questions well to help pupils reflect on what they have learnt and to encourage them to explain their understanding. However, there are limited strategies in place to help pupils take responsibility for their learning and to enable them to produce the best work possible without constant adult support.

Where there were weaknesses in lessons observed, teaching did not help pupils to recall or build sufficiently well on previous learning; lessons did not include sufficient strategies to engage and motivate learners; and expectations were too low. In these lessons, the pace of learning was too slow and there were often missed opportunities for using information and communication technology to support and enhance pupils' learning. In some mathematics lesson, there were occasions when pupils were not provided with sufficient practical resources or activities to support their understanding of new concepts. The effectiveness of teaching assistants was very variable and at times adversely affected by a lack of guidance and direction from class teachers.

Most senior leaders are developing their roles well and are contributing successfully to the school's honest and accurate judgments about strengths and weaknesses. However, not all leaders have been equally effective at bringing about improvements. The acting headteacher provides the school with clear direction and purpose. As a result, the management of staff performance is now closely aligned to the progress made by pupils, and staff are more focused on the need to raise standards. There are adequate management plans in place but, while these plans make appropriate reference to pupils, some lack detail and success criteria are not always measurable. Subject leaders have yet to produce action plans to identify how they can contribute more fully to whole-school improvement. Staff work well as a team, sharing and disseminating good practice. This creates a positive ethos in the school, with staff learning from each other.

The local authority provides the school with satisfactory support. The local authority's statement of action has been amended and is now fit for purpose. However, until recently the school had not been provided with the updated version. Consequently, the school has been working to the first version and has not benefited from the improvements made to the more recent statement of action. Nevertheless, the school has benefited from being part of the intensifying support for schools programme. The raising achievement plan has helped senior leaders and governors to maintain an appropriate focus on the key issues for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gehane Gordelier". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Gehane Gordelier
H M Inspector