

28 November 2008

Mrs Chris Young
Headteacher
Valley Road Community Primary School
Corporation Road
Hendon
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Dear Mrs Young

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you, your staff, the pupils I met, the chair of governors and your school improvement officer gave when I inspected your school on 27 November 2008. Thank you for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

Since the previous inspection there has been an increase in the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and of those who are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has risen. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school at times other than usual, remains very high. The level of children's development when they start school in the nursery is declining, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development and their communication and language skills. Staffing remains stable overall, although a number staff are currently absent. There are four newly qualified teachers.

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As a result of the inspection in November 2007, the school was asked to:

- Improve the quality of writing across the school.
- Improve assessment, marking and tracking so as to improve progress for individual pupils.
- Increase the level of challenge for more able pupils.
- Ensure that school self-evaluation and planning focus rigorously on the impact on pupils' progress.

■ Improve attendance.

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

Work seen in lessons and in pupils' books shows that progress is beginning to accelerate especially in writing. The school's data on progress show that the vast majority of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are making progress at a satisfactory rate in reading, writing and mathematics. As pupils move through the school their rate of progress increases so that there are more pupils reaching the nationally expected standards for their age in Years 5 and 6 than there are in younger year groups. However standards remain too low and the school is aware of the need to accelerate progress even more.

Results of national tests at Key Stage 2 have shown a rising trend over a number of years although they remain significantly below average overall. The 2008 provisional results of Key Stage 2 national tests were similar to those in 2007. There was an increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in English. Boys were further behind than girls in English, mathematics and science. The school's analysis of the 2008 results shows that most pupils made progress in line with nationally expected rates.

The 2008 provisional results of Key Stage 1 national assessments dipped compared to 2007 results which were significantly below average. Writing continues to be weaker than reading and mathematics. There was no significant difference between girls' and boys' results. Provisional national data suggest that pupils did not make as much progress as pupils with similar backgrounds.

Children at the end of Reception in summer 2008 reached lower levels of development than children in previous years, especially in their personal, social and emotional development and, for boys, in reading and writing. Action has been taken to tackle this and is helping to improve progress. The school has developed approaches to learning in Year 1 that follow the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This has enabled pupils to continue their development with provision that is well matched to their needs and that helps them to enjoy learning and make progress. In the Foundation Stage Unit additional specialised bilingual support, more adult support for activities initiated by the children, and a recently appointed male learning support assistant are all helping to improve children's progress especially for boys. There has been much closer liaison with home which has led to improved attendance and greater involvement of families and carers in children's learning.

Since the previous inspection, the school's leaders have tackled the issues identified for improvement rigorously and enthusiastically. The headteacher, very ably supported by senior leaders and governors, has developed a vision for the school that focuses very clearly on pupils' enjoyment of learning and achievement,

especially in writing. Staff have worked as a coherent team to bring about significant changes to the curriculum. They have improved the use of assessment information to ensure that what the school provides through the curriculum and the teaching is well matched to pupils' individual needs. As a result there is evidence in the pupils' current work of accelerating progress, especially in writing.

The relevant, exciting and stimulating curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to writing. Many pupils write because they want to say something about what they have experienced, seen or discussed. For example, there were examples of vibrant writing following a visit to an ice-rink and chance meeting with the local mayoress. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to talk about what they are going to write about and drama activities help to stimulate thinking, talking and writing. Girls and boys in Year 4 wrote lengthy accounts of the story of Diwali after they had used puppets to act out the story. The school is awash with opportunities for pupils to write for real purposes and as a result, many pupils are writing independently because they want to. Since the previous inspection the school has introduced daily basic skills sessions. These are well planned and taught and the tight focus on progression in basic skills helps pupils to improve the technical skills that underpin their writing.

The improving use of assessment, marking and tracking is helping accelerate progress for individual pupils. The school is taking part in a pilot scheme for the National Strategy approach to assessing pupils' progress (APP) for numeracy which is helping to focus lesson-by-lesson planning even more closely on individual pupils' needs. There are plans to introduce the same approach for literacy next term. The school has introduced an assessment scheme that measures more accurately the small steps that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make, helping to guide planning and learning more effectively.

The analysis of pupils' performance by key subject and senior leaders at two points in the year identifies gaps in learning. This analysis informs teachers' planning and the setting of class targets that guide teaching and learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, teaching is well focused on closing the gaps in learning. Pupils find their targets helpful. They like to know how they can succeed and they enjoy a sense of achievement when they reach their targets. Systems have been established that ensure that all staff are made accountable for pupils' progress. Every class teacher meets key leaders each term to review all pupils' progress. Pupils falling behind the nationally expected rate of progress are identified. The additional support they receive is helping to boost their learning. As a result of the improved use of assessment data, teaching is more tightly focused on pupils' individual needs and support is well targeted to individual needs.

Since the previous inspection a revised marking policy has been implemented. Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers give encouraging comments that evaluate pupils' success against the success criteria for lessons. Teachers pose relevant questions or make suggestions as to how pupils can make improvements and, increasingly, pupils respond positively to their comments.

The school is making better use of assessment information to ensure that activities are challenging, particularly for the more able pupils. Activities in lessons and beyond school are designed to develop independence. In a Year 4 class a more able pupil competently led a group drama activity and, as a result, all the pupils involved produced good quality writing. Each classroom poses additional challenges that are relevant to topics being learned. Many pupils take these up and enjoy working on them independently. The policy and register of gifted and talented pupils has been up-dated. Additional provision for more able pupils in mathematics provided by a local secondary school helped most of these pupils to achieve above the nationally expected level in national tests.

The school's self-evaluation activities and planning are linked more rigorously to the impact on pupils' progress. The scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and lesson observations are well focused on areas identified for improvement through the close analysis of pupils' performance. Performance management is linked to the school's priorities.

Attendance has improved a little from 91.7% in 2006/07 to 92.6% in 2007/08. The school has worked hard to raise parents' awareness of the importance of good attendance. A strict policy with regard to unauthorised absence is operated. The education home visitor is using even more rigorous systems to follow up absences quickly. A number of pupils have improved their attendance significantly after the intervention and support of the education home visitor. These pupils are much happier in school and are far more confident, and ready and able to learn.

The school improvement partner, local authority consultants, advisers and advanced skills teachers have provided well focused and effective guidance and training for staff and leaders especially in approaches to assessment, self-evaluation, literacy and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely



Gillian Salter-Smith
Additional Inspector