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Mr J Walden  
The Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Walden

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my 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 September 2007, the school was asked to:

- build on current work to improve standards in English, mathematics and science across the school and, in particular, the quality of pupils' writing
- ensure that higher attaining pupils are fully extended by the work they are given to do
- provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum.

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' achievements.

In 2005 to 2007, standards in Key Stage 2 were exceptionally low. In 2008, standards have risen to above the floor target in each subject for the first time in four years. In English, standards in Year 6 remain below average despite having improved notably, because attainment in writing remains markedly lower than that in reading. Standards in mathematics have risen too and are below average. In both

subjects, the proportion of higher achievers, whilst no longer very low, remains below average. A particular improvement was secured in terms of attainment in science, where standards were exceptionally low in 2007 and are now in line with national averages for pupils of all abilities. Most pupils made two levels of progress in reading, mathematics and science across Key Stage 2, although rates of progress have been stronger in Years 3 and 4 than in Years 5 and 6. Until recently, too few pupils have made expected progress in writing across the school. Furthermore, test results at the end of Year 2 in 2008 show that standards are very low, although this class entered school with very low levels in terms of their communication and social skills.

This year, after a period of uncertainty and personnel changes which had an adverse impact on achievement across the school, the school has been able to stabilise its staffing arrangements. Key leaders in the school are back in post. The new headteacher has brought a very clear sense of direction for the school and a focus on raising standards. Much has been done to build upon last year's involvement by the school in the local authority's Intensifying Support Programme to provide focused teaching for those pupils at risk of failing to reach expected levels. This year, the school is now working on enhancing the accuracy of assessments and teachers have a clearer view of what pupils of all abilities are capable of achieving.

This has led to an improvement in the level of challenge in the teaching across the school and, as a consequence, progress rates across classes this year are at least satisfactory and often good. Learning objectives for literacy and numeracy lessons are appropriate for each age group. In most classes, the assessment of pupils' prior learning is used to inform guided group work led by both the teachers and the effective teaching assistants so that the learning is more closely tailored to the needs of the less and more able. Resources are being used well, including information and communication technology (ICT) to help teachers model new concepts and skills. In the most effective lessons, a premium is placed on involving pupils in all stages of their own learning, for example through effective questioning and 'partner talk' during whole class discussions and by the setting of practical enquiry tasks that enable pupils to apply their skills to real problems. In less effective lessons, the pace at which pupils' work drops and opportunities for independent learning are missed, leading to an over reliance by pupils on adults.

The whole school focus on assessing pupils' progress has enabled all staff to become fully involved in, and accountable for, tracking achievement and setting targets. Senior staff have used their analysis of past performance to set challenging but increasingly realistic targets for what pupils will achieve this year. The complex needs of some of the pupils who are now in Year 3 are being well met through effectively targeted phonics teaching and external agency support. Most are making accelerated progress this year. Having made better progress this term as a result of improved teaching and learning, pupils in other year groups are catching up the lost ground and are increasingly on track to meet their targets. Attainment is still below average in some classes, especially in writing and for the more able, but the gap between expected and actual performance is being narrowed over time.

Considerable emphasis is being placed on improving provision for the teaching of writing. Planning for literacy lessons is based on the revised framework so expectations of what pupils might achieve are higher. Older pupils, especially the more able, are being given more opportunities to apply their learning and write at length. Guided writing groups are used in most classes and an effective new system for sharing targets on how to improve their written scripts is being piloted with pupils in Year 3 and Year 6. However, because approaches to target setting are still being developed, some pupils remain unclear as to the level at which they are operating and how to improve their writing further. Overall, the approaches being used to improve writing standards are showing promise but it is too soon to judge their full impact on results gained in the national tests.

The school is well aware there is more to do to raise the achievement of more able pupils, some of whom have lower than expected starting points. Teachers are clearer now about what these pupils should be achieving. They are asking questions of these pupils during their inputs to the class, expecting more of them when they work in small groups and checking their progress closely as a team. However, teachers are not making explicit what successful learning looks like for higher achievers in all lessons. Also, whilst examples were seen of able pupils assessing their own work and that of others, these approaches are not yet embedded in practice across the school.

There are good opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in a number of other subjects across the curriculum. In all classes, pupils are given opportunities to write in a range of styles for different purposes and audiences. They have benefited from being able to use written tasks to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, express feelings and ideas, organise and develop their own thoughts, and to plan enquiry work and present findings. Pupils report feeling more confident about their skills as authors and value writing more as a result. The school is working hard to increase the opportunities pupils get to apply their numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum in equivalent depth but, as yet, this remains underdeveloped.

The school is emerging from a period of uncertainty with a renewed focus on raising standards and capacity to improve further. Leaders are clear about the strategies to adopt and the staff fully aware of their shared accountabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

David Townsend  
Her Majesty's Inspector