

29 January 2009

Mrs J Jennings
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jennings

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 28 January 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful to the pupils and governors who spoke with me.

There have been some changes to the school's context since the previous inspection in June 2008. Three members of the teaching staff have recently resigned their posts; this includes one member of the leadership team. Two members of staff are on extended sickness absence leave. There have been some changes to leadership responsibilities, a member of staff has taken on the role of special needs coordinator and an inclusion team has been established. There are two new parent governors.

As a result of the inspection in June 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards in Key Stage 1, especially in writing, and in the upper years in English generally in order to improve the achievement of all pupils, and girls, in particular
- improve attendance to enable all pupils to make at least satisfactory progress
- improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that there is sufficient good or better teaching to overcome pupils' previous underachievement
- improve teachers' use of data to track and improve pupils' progress.

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.

Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is below what is typical for Reception age pupils overall and particularly in the area of communication, language and literacy. By the end of EYFS, Foundation Stage profile assessments indicate that generally, children attain below their peers locally and nationally. There is evidence of some good gains in children's personal development. The school's data indicate that these good gains have continued with this year's intake, particularly in linking sounds and letters, reading, calculation and personal development. The reliability of assessments in the EYFS, through observations of children playing, has improved by close working with the local authority's Early Years consultant.

Standards remain well below the national average in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Over the past four years to 2008, Key Stage 1 test results have declined each year. In 2008, the results were particularly low. Standards were well below average in all subjects and were particularly low in writing. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 were below average between 2004 and 2006. They improved to be broadly average in 2007. In 2008, 65% of pupils attained Level 4 or above in English and 73% in mathematics. Girls generally attained better than boys. For this group of pupils, progress in Key Stage 2 was inadequate overall, but school data indicate that they made satisfactory and sometimes good progress in their final year. The school's progress tracking shows that the number of pupils working below age-related expectations across the school is too high. This reflects some long-standing underachievement across the school, particularly in writing and mathematics. The rate at which pupils are catching up is generally improving. Where this is not the case, it relates to some issues connected with staffing difficulties.

Pupils write for a variety of purposes. Pupils' books show some progress over the past year in the length and organisation of writing, and the ability to write appropriately for different purposes. Older pupils have a fairly clear idea of what counts as good writing. However, writing skills are well below average and improvement is patchy for some lower ability pupils. Mathematics books similarly show some progress. Teachers are conscientious in their marking of books which pupils value. Pupils are becoming increasingly aware of what they need to do to improve their work. They are keen to do well and many know their class and individual targets.

The school's systems for closely tracking the attainment and progress of every pupil are good and are becoming increasingly effective at identifying pupils who need extra help. There is a range of appropriate well targeted interventions in place to support individual pupils. Assessment information is increasingly being used by class teachers to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils. Planning always identifies clear learning intentions and activities are tailored to three ability levels. Whilst

planned activities are usually well matched to abilities, there is some scope for the fine-tuning of tasks to further raise expectations.

The quality of teaching and learning is improving but remains too variable. Some teaching is good and almost all lessons contain some good features. The use of a common planning format and agreed practices of sharing learning intentions and explaining how work will be assessed are helping pupils to understand the purpose of their work. The use of classroom displays and learning walls, along with learning ladders, is helping to remind pupils of their recent lessons and show them what their next steps will be. Where teaching and learning are not as strong it is as a direct result of some instability of staffing. The school is well aware of these issues and is taking appropriate steps to improve the learning and progress of these pupils.

Good use is made of the available teaching time with a clear focus on developing the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. For example, daily 'morning work' is used to encourage pupils to practise recent learning. Younger pupils have regular phonics sessions and across the school good use is made of KIRFS (key instant recall of facts) time to practise mathematical skills. Teachers give clear explanations and use good quality resources such as books and interactive whiteboards to help interest pupils. The practice of encouraging pupils to discuss their ideas and answers with a 'talk partner' is developing well. However, there are some times when pupils spend too long listening to their teachers and not enough time on tasks. A valuable contribution is made by teaching assistants. Relationships are positive across the school and behaviour is generally good.

Whilst the overall quality of teaching has improved, it has not yet impacted on the standards and progress of all pupils across the whole school. This is primarily because a legacy of underachievement remains and some of the school's strategies for improvement are too new to see sustained gains. In addition, some staffing issues remain.

There has been some improvement in rates of attendance during this academic year. Currently the attendance rate is 93.2% compared with 92.3 % for the same period last year. This figure is above the rate for other similar local schools. There are strategies in place to reward good attendance and every class has its weekly attendance rate displayed. The attendance rate is adversely affected by the small number of families that take extended leave to visit their families in Poland. There are some strategies in place to work closely with families to minimise the impact of these extended periods of absence on learning. There is good support from the Polish speaking home and school liaison worker.

The local authority (LA)'s support for the school is effective. The LA statement of action addressed the priorities for improvement, set challenging targets and appropriate support to reach them. There are clear milestones to aid evaluation of the school's progress. The plan has recently been amended to respond even more closely to the developing needs of the school, for example, by providing focused

support for more able pupils in a particular year group. The LA has agreed to release a new member of staff early from their current post to take up a key leadership position at the school. There is ongoing support and development from LA consultants and an advanced skills teacher.

The strong resolve of the headteacher has had a positive impact on the progress that the school is making. The senior leadership team is united in a sense of purpose and they share the headteacher's determination to bring about improvements for the benefit of all pupils. Term-by-term plans to raise attainment are supported by a coherent programme of professional development. The school's leadership team undertakes regular monitoring and provides useful feedback to staff. This has helped to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and there are some signs of improvement in outcomes.

Overall, there is a clear sense of direction, strong leadership and a desire to improve. Clear improvements in the quality of teaching, close tracking of progress and the use of assessment data to support pupils who need extra help are all having a positive impact. However, there is, as yet, still a gap between improvements in provision and its discernable impact of progress for all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali

Her Majesty's Inspector