

28 January 2009

Mr P Nelis
Headteacher
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Prince of Wales Road
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Dear Mr Nelis

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 27 January 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to the many pupils who spoke to me, too.

The school's context remains largely as it was at the time of the previous inspection, but a new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 07 and 08 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve provision in the EYFS in order to raise standards and achievement
- raise standards and achievement in science at Key Stages 1 and 2
- improve the rigour and effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in science.

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 pupils' achievement.

The provisional results of national tests in 2008 confirm that pupils' standards are close to the national average in English, and broadly in line in mathematics and science. This indicates positive achievement from a generally below average starting point, and a particular improvement in science compared with the previous year.

A thorough transformation of the EYFS provision has begun. Improvements in leadership, teaching, learning and the curriculum are clearly evident in the Nursery and emerging in the Reception class. As a result, children are building on their initial attainment more rapidly. Although their communication and social skills are often below the expected levels for their ages, children are generally willing to speak, work

in partnership and engage in role play or re-enacting stories. Small steps of progress are systematically recorded and this information is increasingly being used to plan for the next steps in learning. All EYFS staff are involved in training and regular meetings to review and plan for children's progress. As a result, staff are becoming adept at supporting continuous provision, and children are gradually becoming more involved in, and stretched by, the wider and more stimulating range of activities. Much remains to be done to embed new approaches and fulfil the ambitious plans, which include ensuring good transition arrangements to consolidate early progress in literacy. Nevertheless, a solid start has been made.

The school has shown a similarly determined approach to raising standards in science in Key Stages 1 and 2. Having achieved a significant improvement in national test results for 11-year-olds in 2008, it has since focused on ensuring consistently good progress across the age range. Better assessment and monitoring are in place and having a positive impact on provision. Early evidence indicates that a substantial majority of pupils are on track to make two or more levels of progress between Year 2 and Year 6. However, the rate of progress varies substantially between classes, indicating that there is more to be done to level up the quality of teaching and learning.

With good support from senior leaders and external advisers, the coordinator has played a more significant part in developing the quality of provision for science. He has helped teachers to assess more reliably what pupils can do, to track their progress term by term and to intervene where more challenge or support is needed. He has analysed assessment data diagnostically, identifying weaker aspects of pupils' understanding, then working with teachers to tackle these. Development opportunities for staff have included observing science teaching in another school and planning, teaching and reviewing alongside the coordinator. Regular briefings have spread knowledge about good practice in using investigative and collaborative work in science. Such guidance has had some impact on teachers' planning for pupils' different needs and on the helpfulness of marking and responses to pupils' spoken ideas. Teachers are now held to account for their pupils' progress in science through regular meetings. The effectiveness of this focus was evident during the visit in some exciting and productive lessons, some thoughtful writing about science investigations by pupils, and their generally positive attitudes to the subject. However, there remains significant variation between classes. For example, in some pupils' books there is little evidence of independent investigation, and opportunities are sometimes missed in lessons to help pupils understand the purpose of their work and how to tackle it well as young scientists.

The school's leaders have tackled the programme for improvement wholeheartedly and are investing considerable effort and resources in making effective changes. They have made good use of substantial and effective support from the local authority (LA). The school improvement partner has worked helpfully with the school to develop the statement of action into a practical and carefully monitored plan, and milestones for improvement have largely been met. The school's involvement in the

Intensive Support Programme is providing a helpfully firm structure for the development of the systematic tracking of pupils' progress, target setting and differentiated learning. LA consultants have provided well targeted support matched to the identified priorities for the EYFS. The LA was instrumental in establishing a link with a local primary school which is providing a model for improvements in science, and in securing a visit from an external consultant which has helped to galvanise the science coordinator's role. The school now needs to achieve consistency in the priorities it has identified.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector