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Mrs Heather Phillips
The Headteacher
Blakesley Hall Primary School
Yardley Green Road
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Dear Mrs Phillips

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 26 February 2009, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff and chair of governors who talked to me and to those who organised the work scrutiny.

Since the last inspection in January 2008, the school has moved into new premises. A deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher have been appointed. A number of staff have taken maternity leave during the past year. Currently, three supply teachers are covering maternity leave in Reception and Years 2 and 4. Eight new governors have been appointed since the last inspection.

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

- provide more opportunities for pupils to speak in lessons and make better use of time available for reading
- ensure letters to parents regarding attendance and punctuality are written in their community language
- assess pupils' progress more frequently in Years 1 to 5 so that teachers can plan lessons that more closely meet the needs of pupils
- analyse data more rigorously so that actions to improve can be implemented more swiftly in response to changing circumstances and legislation, including that on child protection.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in raising standards and improving attendance and punctuality.

The last inspection report judged that standards were inadequate but no area for improvement was given for this aspect. Year 2 standards have been extremely low since 2005. Standards have been declining since 2004, but in 2008 the downward trend was stopped. In 2008, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were far too low. Initiatives to improve pupils' knowledge of letters and sounds and writing skills are starting to pay dividends with Year 2 pupils' progress beginning to accelerate in all three subjects. Nevertheless, standards remain low with too few pupils reaching the expected level for their age. Pupils' progress remains inconsistent. For example, the average and more able writers in Year 2 made at least satisfactory progress during the autumn term 2008, but the less able writers' progress was slow. Year 6 standards have been significantly below average since 2003. In 2008, English standards dipped to extremely low and remained significantly below average in mathematics. The variation between pupils' attainment in reading and writing was too wide. Overall, too few pupils reached the expected and higher National Curriculum levels in English or mathematics. The school did not meet the floor targets set by the government with regard to the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level for their age. Performance data for the current Year 6 cohort predicts that in 2009 overall standards will be similar to those achieved in 2008. Pupils' progress varies between Years 3 and 6. For example, pupils' progress in writing is good in Year 6 but unsatisfactory in Year 4. In the past, whole school Year 6 targets have been set in line with local authority requirements. However, they have been overly ambitious and therefore have not been met. The targets set for 2009 are more realistic.

Inspectors judged attendance as inadequate in January 2008 and it has not sufficiently improved since then. Too many pupils are persistently absent and there are too many latecomers. Authorised and unauthorised absence is much higher than the national average. Attendance for this academic year is 91.7%, which is below the 93.8% school target. Too many parents are taking holidays during term time despite the school's efforts to reduce the number. The headteacher and chair of governors both acknowledge that the strategies currently being used to improve attendance are not fully effective. Leaders also recognise any procedures that are adopted must 'have teeth' so that parents are held to account for their child's non attendance. Following the last inspection, the school canvassed parents' views to see whether letters to them regarding attendance and punctuality should be written in community languages. The conclusion reached was it was not a worthwhile thing to do. Following further discussion with the headteacher and chair of governors, the school will review its stance on this matter. They also recognised the need to employ a wider range of strategies to improve attendance.

Satisfactory progress has been made with regard to providing more opportunities for pupils to speak in lessons and make better use of time available for reading. There is now a listening and speaking policy and a wider range of strategies are used to encourage pupils to speak and engage in discussion with the teacher and each other. Some teachers get pupils to work in pairs to discuss their ideas and thoughts before answering questions. This helps them to clarify their thinking and increases their enjoyment of learning. Another good strategy that is sometimes adopted is to

get pupils to orally rehearse the language they will use to answer a question or to write instructions. Where this is done well teachers model the grammar and structure of English and get pupils to practise various language forms to improve their speaking skills. In general, not enough modelling of language is being done, particularly for those who speak English as an additional language. Reading provision has improved and time is used more wisely for reading activities. Guided reading work and more effective teaching of letters and sounds are helping improve pupils' reading competence, particularly in Year 2.

Satisfactory progress has been made improving the assessment of pupils' progress in Years 1 to 5. Assessments in English, mathematics and science are more regular and information is now being used to target support to where it is most needed. This said, teachers do not always use assessment information effectively to plan work that is consistently challenging. The school lacks a spelling and handwriting policy to establish how these aspects will be taught coherently and consistently. The pupils' current work reveals that marking is inconsistent and spelling and grammatical errors in writing are not being remedied quickly enough. A useful audit has been done of the strengths and weaknesses in English as an additional language provision. However, the school does not have a written policy as to how pupils with English as an additional language will be taught, although it does have a suitable framework to assess their linguistic needs.

Adequate progress has been made improving the analysis of data to enable the school to respond swiftly to changing circumstances and legislation, including that on child protection. The school has a single central record and it contains nearly all of the required information. Employment and staff vetting procedures are satisfactory, but some identity checks are not always recorded as having been done. The date on which checks were carried out, and by whom, is not always specified. A new pupil progress tracking system has been adopted and it is providing sound information about pupils' attainment and progress in each year. Data is now being used to call teachers to account for pupils' progress in class and subjects, and to inform intervention, particularly where underachievement is pinpointed. Tracking data is not yet been used effectively to ensure that quantitative, measurable targets are identified in the school improvement plan. A satisfactory child protection policy exists and the designated person responsible for child protection has been trained at the appropriate level.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Her Majesty's Inspector