

12 February 2009

Mrs Liz McAllister  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs McAllister

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 February 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. I also welcomed the opportunity to talk with other members of the management team and the school improvement partner. Please pass on my thanks to all those involved.

As a result of the inspection on 16-17 January 2008, the school was asked to do the following.

- Develop the leadership and management roles of team leaders and curriculum coordinators.
- Improve teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage.

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

Since the previous inspection the headteacher has left the school and taken up a post in another authority. The deputy headteacher has been instrumental in initiating changes designed to secure improvement. The school is presently led by an experienced interim headteacher who took up post in January 2009. Together, the headteacher and deputy headteacher are providing strong leadership based on a clear understanding of the issues that have yet to be addressed. A new Foundation Stage leader commenced in January 2009. Foundation Stage 1 has been successfully managed by a temporary teacher since September 2008 who has, since January 2009, been working alongside a permanent member of staff. The latter will take over this responsibility completely after the forthcoming half-term holiday. The school has been well supported by the local authority.

Many children enter Foundation Stage 1 with standards below that expected for their age. By the end of Year 2 pupils attain close to the national average for reading and writing and lower than the national average in mathematics. Unvalidated results of the Key Stage 2 national tests taken in 2008 show that standards in English are above the national average and just below in mathematics and science. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 exceeds the national average in English and mathematics and matches it in science. Given their low starting points, achievement is good. However, pupils, particularly those of higher ability, make better progress in Key Stage 2 than in the rest of the school.

The current headteacher, ably supported by an extremely competent deputy headteacher, provides good leadership. They have a very good understanding of what needs to be done to take the school forward. Features of leadership include high expectations of staff and pupils, consistency and conformity with regard to the implementation of school policy and the development of collective responsibility. Managers at all levels welcome and share this approach and feel part of the drive for improvement. Recent actions taken by senior leaders which are improving the quality of teaching and learning include a common planning format, regular pupil progress meetings to identify underachievement, the use of attainment data the monitoring of planning, work sampling and the monitoring of guided reading. Many of the middle managers, including curriculum coordinators, are relatively new in post. They are keen to develop their roles and understand what has to be done to secure and sustain improvement, especially with regard to teaching and learning. At present, a number of middle managers lack the skills necessary to monitor practice throughout the school. For example, they are unable to monitor effectively the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations, work sampling and scrutiny of planning. Plans are in hand for these key staff to be trained but this should be a matter of priority. Good progress has been made in addressing the areas for improvement under the current leadership; however, given that the school was inspected over a year ago, progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Provision in Foundation Stage 1 has improved significantly since January 2008. Under the direction of the temporary teacher progress has been swift. Changes to the learning environment have improved children's access to all areas of learning, particularly with regard to mathematical understanding. Good opportunities are provided for children to develop understanding through imaginative play. Key workers are deployed well and intervene appropriately to support learning by asking questions that extend children's thinking. Good systems are in place to assess children's progress, especially in relation to their personal, social, and emotional development as well as their progress in the acquisition of skills in language and communication, speaking and listening. The information gleaned is used well to ensure that provision is matched well to individual needs. As a consequence, children are making at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The school recognises the importance and value of outdoor learning and staff work hard to provide opportunities for learning that are closely linked to topics being pursued indoors. However, there are no facilities for children to enhance their physical development through climbing, balancing and swinging.

Progress has not been as rapid in Foundation Stage 2. The leader of the Foundation Stage started in January 2009 and recognises that there is much to do to improve provision and raise standards. Plans to review the curriculum, introduce a two-year cycle to avoid repetition and develop the use of the outdoor area so that children in both Foundation Stage classes can benefit, are appropriate and necessary. The lack of consistent, effective assessment systems inhibits progress because activities are not always matched to children's learning needs. Good practice is reflected in carefully planned activities that are well structured and overseen by a teacher or teaching assistant who engages with the children to take their learning forward. This is not always the case. On occasions, children are not engaged in a purposeful way, receive little direction and as result, make insufficient progress. There remains work to be done in ensuring that the quality of provision is consistent throughout the phase. At the time of the previous inspection concerns were raised about standards of behaviour in the Foundation Stage. This is no longer a concern and children's behaviour observed during the visit was at least satisfactory and often good. This is because clear expectations have been established to which children respond. There is a clear link between activities that engage and stretch children when behaviour is good as opposed to activities that are insufficiently challenging and have no anticipated outcome so children's attention lapses. Although significant steps have been taken to improve provision in Foundation Stage 1 there is still room for considerable improvement in Foundation Stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler  
Her Majesty's Inspector