

13 May 2009

Mr Darren Mussell
Headteacher
Great Harwood St John's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Mussell

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 12 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the children and to the governors for being equally helpful.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

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

- Improve achievement and raise standards in English, mathematics and science
- Improve the challenge of teaching by using accurate assessments of pupils' progress to plan lessons better matched to pupils' abilities.
- Ensure that marking consistently helps pupils to understand their learning targets and what they need to do to improve.

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.

Pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science is showing steady improvement as evidenced in pupils' work and in the school's most recent assessment data. Consistently good teaching in some year groups is narrowing the gap between pupils' standards and the levels they are expected to reach for their age. This is particularly the case in mathematics. In this subject, over 75% of pupils in four year groups now attain national expectations. Attainment in reading and writing, however, remains low particularly for pupils in lower Key Stage 1 and in

most of Key Stage 2. In these subjects 50% or more of the pupils do not attain the levels which are expected of their age. More Year 6 pupils than in 2008 are currently on track to reach the expected Level 4 in English, mathematics and science.

In lessons, pupils' learning and progress have improved since the last inspection. Pupils enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge that are well below those typically found in children of this age. By the time they leave Year 2 they have made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In the last three years progress in Key Stage 2 has been inadequate. There was some improvement in 2008 and evidence in pupils' books and in lessons indicates that progress is now satisfactory overall. It will take some time to compensate for the lack of progress over a number of years, but the school's initiatives and improvements are having a positive impact.

Governors and senior leaders have taken difficult decisions to tackle problems with staffing and inadequacies in teaching. Although not fully resolved, evidence suggests staffing is more stable and teaching is improving. During this inspection, two out of the five observed lessons were good and none inadequate. The school is using effective teaching strategies to improve the quality of pupils' learning. Pupils are more engaged and challenged in lessons. They spend less time sitting listening and more time actively involved in tasks. In the good lessons, pupils have opportunities to think, reason and to explain their ideas and methods. They are engaged in real tasks that stimulate their interest and allow them to use their skills. In one lesson for example, pupils' understanding of habitats and their use of questions was improved whilst they examined some large African snails. Lessons are more challenging because they are based on an assessment of pupils' needs rather than on published schemes of work. Opportunities to liaise with colleagues from other schools have helped to improve assessment and teaching. Teachers have undergone some whole-school training, and regular monitoring by school leaders and the local authority. This rigour is bringing about some improvements to lessons. Teachers have regularly and frequently moderated their assessments of pupils' work. This has ensured greater accuracy in assessment. Teachers are now beginning to use these assessments in their lesson plans to construct activities to move pupils' learning on. There is still some way to go to ensure that all teaching is of a good enough standard to improve pupils' achievement further and to eradicate the prior weaknesses in their learning.

Teachers' marking is appreciated by pupils who now find it clearer and more helpful. Pupils also appreciate the chance to feedback their perceptions about each lesson and to tell the teacher whether they have understood what has been taught. Teachers mark work diligently and give praise, and in some classes, clear tips on how pupils can improve their next piece of work. Despite this, and the regular setting of personal targets, pupils in some year groups remain unsure what precisely they need to do to improve their work. This is partly because not enough time is given for pupils to review their previous work or take account and respond to the teacher's comments. It is also partly because changes in staffing mean that some school initiatives are not embedded in all classes.

School leaders are keeping a closer check on pupils' progress and have a clearer picture of which pupils are not performing as well as expected. Intervention systems are beginning to be effectively targeted to provide pupils with more specific support. School leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. With the local authority's support, the school has planned appropriate actions to tackle the main weaknesses. Effective and prioritised input from local authority advisers and consultants and the school improvement partner has helped senior leaders to accelerate the school's progress. The success criteria on the plan are sometimes too general to be effectively measured by governors and senior leaders. Reports to governors are sometimes not sufficiently based on the impact their work is having on pupils' outcomes. This hampers the school's ability to precisely measure the impact of their initiatives.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector