

15 June 2009

Ms Sue Blyth  
Headteacher  
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Gordonbrock Road  
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Dear Ms Blyth

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 10 June 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to thank those who took the time to talk to me including yourself, the senior and middle managers, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, the head of school effectiveness and the School Improvement Partner.

Since the last inspection, the school's roll has increased and it is expected to admit three forms of entry when the rebuilding of the school takes place in the near future. Currently, plans are being considered to ensure that the new build can take place smoothly when it begins. One member of staff left at the end of the spring term and was replaced by an experienced teacher. A second teacher will be leaving at the end of the current term. The school has not been able to appoint a suitable literacy coordinator and, currently, a deputy manages this subject. The senior leaders are considering alternative appointments to this post for 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 8 and 9 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- accelerate pupils' progress across the school to raise standards
- ensure teachers use challenging targets to match learning to the range of pupils' capabilities
- develop the monitoring and evaluation skills of middle leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to sustain improvements.

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.

A local authority Partnership Board was set up in response to the school's lower than expected performance. It has taken swift measures to equip senior staff with the necessary management skills to introduce suitable systems to raise achievement and standards further. Consequently, there is an unrelenting focus on all pupils making better progress.



Leaders and managers at all levels have developed a strong database to track pupils' progress and drive improvement. Tracking is now a regular feature of the teachers' work. They use it to measure the rate of pupils' progress every six weeks, so that individuals and/or groups who are likely to fall behind expectations can be spotted at an early stage. The assessment data are colour-coded and analysed in relation to gender, ethnicity and special needs so that trends in performance can be identified. This approach ensures that no pupil is left behind. In particular, middle leaders are increasingly developing their understanding of interpreting assessment data and spotting irregularities in performance. The quality of marking has improved and exemplary practice is evident in some classes in Years 2 and 3. Good attention is paid to developing good learning skills through setting pupils clear targets when their work is marked. Pupils say that they know they have been well taught when marking includes 'ticks and comments' which help them to know how to improve.

The school has set challenging targets to reflect pupils' starting points and the performance of similar schools. Senior leaders, including governors and staff, recognise that, previously, pupils underachieved because assessment data were not linked to teaching or analysed and used rigorously to respond to pupils' learning. Staff now appreciate that assessment is a key factor in effective learning and, as a result, they are using it to help pupils to make up lost ground in their learning. This is more pronounced for the current Year 6 pupils, who made very little progress in Years 3 and 4. There is also emphasis on teaching phonic skills in the lower school, which is improving standards. All pupils are now making faster progress and most in Year 2 are expected to reach or exceed their targets, which will be an improvement on the previous year's results. Although the gap in pupils' learning has narrowed significantly for Year 6, the predicted results in the national tests indicate that they will not achieve the challenging targets for 2009 and that, overall, the outcomes will be lower than the previous year's, even though the mathematics results are expected to improve.

Much work has been done to ensure that tasks are suitably challenging for the pupils. While there is still much to do to ensure that teaching is consistently good, it has improved since the last inspection. Training, including coaching, team teaching, increased monitoring and critical feedback have been used well to develop teachers' understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Teachers have also benefited from observing good teaching in an outstanding local school. This has led to improvement in planning and better matching of work to pupils' needs. Despite the improvements seen in the lessons observed, pupils were very clear that, although most lessons are fun when they do practical and fun activities, they would like the work to be more challenging. The more able pupils were emphatic that mathematics could be harder and their teachers 'need to spend more time with us explaining the work' instead of thinking they can 'get on with it because they think we are good'.

Specialist teaching and setting in English, mathematics and science have been introduced to stretch the more able pupils. Good partnership work has been developed with Prendergast, an outstanding local secondary school, to provide opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to experience specialist science lessons in

a fully equipped laboratory. Pupils participating in this programme say that the work challenges them. In addition, leaders and managers have worked with staff to set out clear expectations for pupils' progress. Goals for improvement are broken down into manageable targets for pupils to achieve. Pupils know and understand their targets, which are strategically placed in classrooms and books as a reference point for them. Teachers are increasingly involving pupils in assessing and identifying their own targets. Good use is made of the 'goals' booklet which sets out how parents can work in partnership with the school to help their children make better progress. This has led to the school training parents to use targets. Consequently, partnership work has increased, with more parents involved in revising the booklet.

Middle leaders have been equipped with new management and leadership skills. They can articulate the senior team's vision of higher achievement and have a clear grasp of the skills needed to help deliver the plans for improvement. As a result, they have responded well to the coaching and leadership training, and acted upon the advice and support given. They meet regularly with the senior team and, inevitably, accountability at all levels has increased. All of this has allowed the middle managers to grow into their roles. For example, although they do not all use a similar format to plan their actions, they have devised suitable action plans for their specific areas of responsibility. Suitable training internally and externally has prepared them well for monitoring teaching and learning. They work together as a team, sharing planning and good practice. In particular, they share the benefits of their training widely.

Governors know the school and work very closely with the local authority to ensure that the momentum for improvement is sustained. The authority has provided very good support through the link officer, consultant leader, subject consultants and advanced skills teachers. They have worked alongside staff, modelling good practice in the school as well as referring the staff to examples of good practice in the consultant leader's outstanding school. The support has had a positive impact on the progress made by the school. For example, middle managers are confident about their roles and the senior team knows how to measure the effectiveness of the provision. The current work with the school has increased the senior leaders' capacity to drive improvement and the local authority is working with them to sustain the changes when the support ends. However, the managers' role is limited by the constraints of time and resources. This is because most of them spend a large amount of their time as classroom teachers. This affects the extent to which they can consolidate their skills to maintain the capacity for further improvement. The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory.

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

Carmen Rodney  
Her Majesty's Inspector