

13 May 2009

Mrs S Bray
Headteacher
Hindley Green Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bray

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 also pass on my thanks to the six pupils in Year 6 for their comments and views.

Two members of staff have recently taken early retirement and one class teacher has been absent for several months due to illness. Her class of Year 6 pupils is being taught by an experienced temporary teacher. The specialist language centre is closing at the end of the summer term and the pupils who attend have been integrated fully into mainstream classes.

As a result of the inspection on 6-7 November 2008, the school was asked to raise pupils' standards and achievement especially at Key Stage 2; use assessment information more precisely to inform planning to meet the needs of individuals in lessons; engage pupils more actively in lessons and provide more opportunities for them to take responsibility for their learning; use the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation more effectively to prioritise actions and amend plans so that the pace of improvement is accelerated further.

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. There have been some areas of good progress, especially in the use of assessment information and in the development of shared leadership to drive up standards.

The staff show a tangible commitment to work together to improve what the school provides. They are supporting one another and sharing expertise. Senior leaders are acting on advice from local authority (LA) consultants to make clear what counts as

good practice. There is a strong focus on meeting targets and boosting learning. Pupils in Year 6 had a clear view of how well they might do in the national tests and also of their strong and weaker spots. They were aware of the need to do well as a step to secondary schooling and knew their teachers, 'want us to do well'.

Standards are on the rise and the school is on track to meet its targets for 2009. The data from tracking pupils' progress indicate that the majority of pupils are making at least expected progress and a growing proportion is doing even better. This is particularly evident in writing. The introduction of The Big Write has caught the pupils' interest: work on display and in books showed that boys and girls are often writing at length, compiling interesting stories and poems, and showing a sound awareness of the key characteristics of different types of writing. The school is aware that there are inconsistencies to iron out. The accuracy of pupils' spelling and quality of presentation vary as do the frequency of writing events and the quality of teachers' marking. There is good practice to share: some pupils are regularly using success criteria to assess how they have done and some teachers are linking well their comments to individual pupils' targets.

The key to the upward trend is the increasingly effective use of information from tests and assessments to inform teachers' planning of lessons and the allocation of support for groups and individuals. The school has drawn on practice in its partner primary school and refined its procedures to track and review pupils' progress at individual, class and year group level. Senior leaders and class teachers now have a sharper picture of how well each pupil is doing in reading, writing and mathematics. They are setting new targets for those pupils who have made marked progress, and are taking steps to deal with aspects that affect progress, such as irregular attendance, as well as identifying additional activities to help those pupils who have not done as well as expected. However, the reviews of pupils' performance are not specifying the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills that are hindering their progress. As a consequence, support is not always tailored to ensure pupils catch up quickly.

Senior leaders have a fair overview of where improvement is needed in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The analysis of pupils' work and their responses in tests has highlighted gaps in pupils' facility with number, especially in the junior years. The school has introduced new elements to the curriculum, including computer programs and daily challenges, to help root pupils' awareness of number and their confidence in using what they know to tackle problems.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is not as strong as the school believes. There is some way to go to ensure the school meets the criterion set by the local authority of 80% good teaching by July. This is partly because in observing lessons, staff have not always focused sharply enough on how well the pupils are learning and specific aspects of the teaching that could be improved to make a difference and increase consistency of quality. Not enough attention has been given to follow-up observations to check that guidance is being implemented.

There are several good aspects to the teaching. Many classrooms have eye-catching displays of key vocabulary and things to remember which promote pupils' independence as learners. Teachers are generally planning and preparing their lessons well, often incorporating different activities to engage the pupils. Effective use was made, for example, of the interactive whiteboard, small whiteboards, partners and competitions to involve all in the class. Pupils know the purpose of the lesson and teachers draw out the links between lessons. Relationships are good, there is good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants, and pupils are willing learners. Nevertheless, there are some elements that undermine effective learning. Pupils were occasionally unclear as to what they had to do because the teacher did not explain or demonstrate well enough the steps involved. Chances to probe pupils' understanding were missed when teachers' questions required only one word responses or the teachers moved on too quickly. Some tasks for pupils were merely time fillers and some materials were of poor quality.

Shared leadership is developing well. The headteacher is using good support from the local authority to strengthen the skills of the senior leadership team. She is also drawing on her own expertise to work with pupils and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. She has ensured that all staff have followed the agreed plan of action, negotiated ways of working with the partner school, and provided opportunities for staff to lead professional development sessions and work alongside consultants from the local authority. Reports within school and for the governors' monitoring committee have focused primarily on what has been done rather than on its impact. This has resulted in missed opportunities to identify the strategies and actions that have proved to be effective and to amend plans accordingly. The critical approach to the sessions with local authority personnel to review standards provides a useful model for future reviews and evaluations led by the school. Similarly, the detailed report following the local authority's evaluation of the school's progress gives a firm steer in linking action to the agreed success criteria.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector