

19 June 2009

Mr N Tarchetti  
The Headteacher  
Somerford Nursery and Primary Community School  
Draper Road  
Christchurch  
Dorset  
BH23 3AS

Dear Mr Tarchetti

### Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Martin Thomas and I inspected your school on 9 and 10 June 2009, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. I am particularly grateful to the members of the teaching staff, the chair and vice chair of governors, the local authority advisory staff and pupils for the discussions I had with them. Please pass on my thanks to them and to the rest of the staff and the pupils.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 October 2008, the school was asked to address the following areas for improvement.

- Improve achievement by ensuring that more pupils attend school when they should and that pupils in Years 3 to 6 make the progress they are capable of, particularly in mathematics.
- Raise the quality of teaching by making sure that there is a rigorous pace in learning in all lessons and that marking consistently indicates how pupils can improve.
- Ensure that teachers make the best use of pupils' improvement targets in lessons to encourage them to do their best.

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

The headteacher, staff and governors have used the judgements of the October inspection to drive forward developments across all the areas for improvement. In this, the headteacher has shown highly effective and focused leadership in guiding staff and governors in the introduction and development of clear structures to support improvements in the standards achieved by pupils. Governors are fully

informed of the progress of the initiatives which have resulted from the inspection and are increasingly confident to challenge the school and hold senior staff to account for the progress made by the pupils. Relationships within the school are a strength and pupils enjoy school and appreciate the support that they receive from all staff.

The attendance of pupils has improved this year although it is still below the national average. Particularly effective work with families of pupils identified as persistent absentees has resulted in the number in this group reducing by two-thirds. The school has developed a good relationship with the education welfare service. There are regular meetings to identify pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern so that early action to support families can be developed, including attendance clinics. Early indication of a potential attendance issue is supported by contact with parents on the first day of a pupil's absence and the school takes a robust stance regarding holidays during term time. The school communicates strongly the importance of good attendance to parents and carers through reference to 'learning days lost' in each newsletter, certificates for good attenders, and discussions on absence rates for individual pupils during parent teacher consultations.

The school has worked well to focus on the improvement of achievement and standards since the inspection. The key to this improvement is the development and use of an effective and comprehensive system for tracking the progress made by pupils and the implementation of intervention strategies where underperformance is found. This analysis of progress has enabled teachers to raise their expectations for pupils' attainment by the setting of challenging targets. The whole process is supported by the senior leadership team working closely with teachers in the monitoring of the progress made by individual pupils. The result of this is that predictions for the current Year 6 pupils in the national tests this year show a considerable improvement in English, mathematics and science. In particular, predictions for the results in mathematics show a very significant improvement and, if achieved, will be the best achieved by the school, exceeding the very challenging target set. This reflects the focused work undertaken by staff to develop pupils' understanding of mathematics ably led by the subject manager often working on improvement projects with the English manager to ensure integrated improvement strategies. However, the tracking system needs consolidation and, to make the full impact on achievement, teachers need to take more responsibility for the analysis of assessment data to identify underperformance and implement intervention programmes.

The school has developed a rigorous programme to monitor teaching which has been moderated by local authority staff. Records of this monitoring show that the pace of lessons has improved and the proportion of good or better teaching has increased. Observations during the inspection found that the pace of lessons was at least satisfactory, and usually better, but sometimes it slows when too many examples are shared with pupils rather than enabling them to work independently. A clear marking policy is in place which is understood by pupils. Pupils report that they appreciate the advice given to them on their work and that it helps them when they

assess their own learning by, for example, using the happy/sad faces. They know that this means the teacher will adjust activities to help them overcome any difficulties or give them greater challenge. There are some very good examples of marking which gives specific guidance to pupils on their next steps in learning but this is not completely consistent across the school.

The school has used the information from the tracking of pupil progress to develop challenging targets for individuals and groups. Teachers use this information to develop activities that are appropriate and match the needs of pupils. In lessons, clear references are made to the learning objectives and the steps needed to achieve them. The children know their targets and use the support materials, such as the target pyramids, to understand the next steps in their learning. However, this process is fairly new and requires consolidation to ensure sustained impact in terms of raised achievement.

The support that the local authority provides for the school is good. A range of curriculum and professional support has been made available to the school, including significant funding to reduce class sizes, well tailored to meet the needs of the improvement plan. These support strategies have been developed in partnership with the school as needs have changed over the last two terms. Representatives of the school improvement service have met with parents and carers to hear their views and there are plans to undertake a further consultation in the autumn. This has addressed the omission from the original support plan prepared by the local authority shortly after the inspection in October.

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

Robert Pyner  
Her Majesty's Inspector