

13 July 2009

Mrs J Hawkin
Headteacher
Hardwick Primary School
Ferriston
Banbury
OX16 1XE

Dear Mrs Hawkin

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 July 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am grateful to the governor and your School Improvement Partner, who gave of their time to speak to me. Particular thanks are due to the pupils in Year 6 for their lively and articulate contributions.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and accelerate progress in English, mathematics and science, particularly for more able pupils
- improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good throughout the school
- make effective use of assessment data to identify and remedy underperformance and to ensure that all pupils achieve well
- ensure the curriculum provides a clear progression in the teaching of skills and builds on pupils' prior attainment.

Since the last inspection, two teachers have left. A new deputy headteacher and a specialist in teaching Early Years have been appointed for September 2009. In the interim, a senior member of staff has covered the post of deputy headteacher. The intake of the school continues to change, with the attainment of pupils when they start being lower year on year. There are more pupils on roll with learning difficulties and disabilities than there were at the last inspection. More pupils speak English as an additional language, including several who have started in the older classes and who speak little or no English. The school has recently taken on the management of the adjacent children's centre.

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 results of national assessments in 2008 showed that standards had risen from the previous year at both key stages, although they remained below average. These results also showed that pupils' progress had improved. The school has introduced better, more rigorous, systems to track pupils' progress, which provide a much clearer picture of how individuals and groups are achieving. Improvements have been made in both the quality of actual assessments and the ways this information is recorded and analysed. The resultant data confirm that the upward trend in progress has continued during this academic year. Pupils throughout the school are making better progress than at the time of the last inspection, including the more able pupils. This rise in achievement is largely due to the impact of the better assessment systems and more consistent teaching across the school.

The quality of teaching has improved because the rigorous monitoring of lessons, of planning and of pupils' work has given clear feedback to teachers. This has helped them to refine and improve their practice so that inadequate teaching has been eliminated and the proportion of good lessons has risen. Lesson observations during the inspection confirmed that the school's assessment of teaching quality is accurate. Teachers have very positive relationships with pupils, have high expectations of work and behaviour, and manage classes well. Pupils work hard in response and take pride in their success. Teachers make increasingly good use of the improved assessment data in planning lessons. This means that pupils are usually given tasks that are much better matched to their different needs, although there are still some inconsistencies in this.

Better assessments mean that pupils have an increasingly secure knowledge of their own learning which motivates them to succeed. They confirmed that they are clearer about their targets and said that marking has improved, so they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Year 6 pupils received their results in national tests during the inspection. They took delight in their own achievements, and in those of their classmates, because they really understand how well they have done this year in the light of their starting points.

The improved assessment systems not only give teachers valuable information on which to base their planning, but accurately identify any pupils who are falling behind. Class teachers then meet with senior staff to analyse reasons for the shortfall and put in place effective extra help for those pupils who need it. The school's thorough analysis of the impact of these interventions shows that they are helping to raise pupils' attainment. The improved assessments also give school leaders a better overview of achievement. This means that any school-wide issues can be identified and addressed. For example, the better attention paid to practical and investigative work in science has helped to increase pupils' enjoyment of the subject, as well as raising achievement.

Staff have worked effectively to improve the curriculum this year. Better links between subjects have enthused and motivated learners by making tasks more interesting and meaningful to them. Led by the acting deputy headteacher, teachers experimented with how this cross-curricular work could be better organised. They have tried to ensure that all National Curriculum requirements are met, as well as checking that what pupils learn builds systematically on what they have been taught previously. A potentially effective plan is now in place, which provides a much better basis for supporting progression in learning, while keeping all the positive aspects of linking subjects that pupils have so enjoyed.

The leadership of senior staff, with good support from the local authority and strong teamwork from all colleagues, has driven the good progress in addressing the issues for improvement, despite disruptions to staffing. Staff have also maintained and built upon the many positive aspects of personal development seen at the last inspection. The school is well placed to continue to improve.

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

Steven Hill
Additional Inspector