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Mr N Prockter
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Prockter

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 20 October 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 your staff and pupils, the chair of governors and the local authority's lead primary adviser who were very helpful when talking about the school's work.

Since the last inspection, the previous headteacher retired in December 2008 and an acting headteacher was appointed for two terms in the last academic year. In the summer term 2009, the local authority brokered a 'soft' federation between the school and Heronsgate Primary, a local outstanding school. The federation was formalised in September 2009 and is intended to last for two academic years. The former deputy, currently the associate headteacher, has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. Staffing has remained fairly stable since the last inspection. An extensive building programme is planned for 2010 when the school is expected to become a two form entry with capacity for over 450 pupils. Arrangements are in place to appoint a new deputy headteacher before the end of October 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 18–19 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in writing across the school
- improve teaching by raising expectations and matching work more precisely to challenge the more able, particularly in writing
- ensure there is more effective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation to improve the pace of school improvement, leading to more challenging targets.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. This improvement is



being driven by the highly effective leadership of the executive headteacher, who is ably supported by the associate headteacher, governing body and local authority.

Standards in writing improved in the unvalidated 2009 national test results at the end of Year 6. While the English results remain below average overall, the school achieved its best results in writing for the first time in three years. The provisional results in science remained broadly in line with the national average but in mathematics, they declined and were well below average. The previously inconsistent approach to using data to track pupils' progress and the focus on helping Year 6 pupils to develop good attitudes and behaviour are contributory factors to the unexpected dip in mathematics. Standards improved at the end of Year 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. Although progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory, from a low base, a significant proportion of children, particularly boys, did not make sufficient progress in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

While there were marginal improvements, there is still variability in pupils' achievement. The senior staff and team know that there is still more to do to ensure that achievement is better than satisfactory. Leaders and managers acknowledge that outcomes 'should be better' and are therefore more focused on 'narrowing the gaps' between the school's achievement and the national average. Action has been taken to create smaller classes in Years 5 and 6. Observations during the inspection indicate that this move is leading to pupils making better progress. Pupils say that 'the new headteacher has had a big impact' on their work. They also indicated that they enjoy being in small classes because they receive more support from their class teachers and the teaching assistants.

Under clear leadership and with extensive support from Heronsgate Primary School, there is now a sharper focus on pupils writing for different purposes. Pupils are now better informed about how to improve their writing skills, particularly as marking is more informative and includes targets for improvement. As a result of teachers focusing on the writer's use of language, pupils are becoming more confident readers and writers. The monitoring visit confirmed the leaders' views that literacy skills are improving because of better planning and changes in the taught English curriculum. For example, in Year 5, pupils confidently used persuasive techniques to plan and present their arguments. In Year 4, they readily applied the taught skills to highlight and explain the difference between facts and opinions in various articles.

Important work has been undertaken to improve the quality of planning in English. The curriculum has been revised to reflect the national framework; joint planning, training and coaching with staff at Heronsgate school have been undertaken and teachers have begun to use talk much more to approach and improve learning. Additionally, careful selection and use of literacy intervention strategies, and the use of phonics are used well to lay the basic foundations on which to build good literacy skills.



The monitoring visit confirmed the senior leaders' views that teaching and learning have improved significantly since the last inspection. Within a short time, staff have been exposed to some of the best practices within the federation through working with lead teachers from Heronsgate Primary School. Consequently, Boxgrove staff are increasingly aware of school improvement. This was evident in a number of lessons where pupils made good progress when they were suitably challenged to think about their work. Pupils say how much they enjoy lessons when games and various short activities are used, explanation is clear, and teachers challenge them. However, too often, pupils' achievement is satisfactory and occasionally barely so, because expectations are not consistently high enough to ensure they can make faster progress. The school acknowledges that there is still more to be done. For example, work is not always matched to the needs of higher attaining pupils.

There has been a marked improvement in the quality of monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress. There is increased accountability through performance management and regular progress meetings with team leaders, class teachers and senior staff. Tracking systems are being used robustly and senior and middle leaders are becoming effective in holding teachers to account for the progress of every pupil. Increasingly, governors are more involved in obtaining first hand evidence of pupils' progress through monitoring the school's work. They acknowledge that perceived barriers cannot be used as an excuse for underperformance. Although systems are more robust, they are not yet embedded and the school recognises that there is more to be done.

The local authority, aware of the school's history of underperformance, has provided a range of effective support linked to the school's needs. For example, the federation has been highly effective in helping the teachers to embrace school improvement through working with consultants and seasoned practitioners. It has helped staff to understand the executive headteacher's vision of high achievement irrespective of pupils' backgrounds, gender, ability or ethnicity.

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

