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10 December 2009

Mr Barry Read
The R J Mitchell Primary School
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Dear Mr Read

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 and 2 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my particular thanks to the staff I met formally or talked with, to your chair of governors, your school improvement partner and the group of pupils who met with me to share their perspectives of the school.

Since the last inspection pupil numbers have increased slightly. For the first time in recent years the Reception class is full and the number of pupils joining or leaving the school during the course of the year is falling. An additional teacher was appointed from the beginning of this term. This has allowed two senior managers to have regular time to fulfil their other responsibilities by sharing the teaching of a class. A number of staff have recently taken on new roles as key leaders and there have been several changes of governors over the past year.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- accelerate progress to raise standards in mathematics and science
- ensure that all teaching is good or better by providing a consistently good level of challenge and independent learning opportunities for pupils of all abilities
- make better use of assessment to inform day-to-day teaching and learning.

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

Standards reported at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2009 were similar to those at the last inspection. Broadly speaking by the end of the Reception Year the large majority of children reach the expected level for their age. This is not



fully reflected in the picture at the end of Key Stage 1. Overall, standards at this point are not significantly different to those found nationally, but an improvement in mathematics in 2009 was countered by a drop in writing. In recent years the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics has fallen. This might be explained by the high mobility of pupils, but senior leaders are also aware that it raises questions about the accuracy of assessments across the younger year groups which need to be investigated.

Through better use of data the school identified those pupils in Year 6 who were capable of reaching the higher levels in mathematics and science. By targeting support through activities such as booster groups their progress was accelerated. As a result, in both subjects in 2009 the proportion reaching Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 rose from a low baseline to over a third, with smaller increases in the proportion reaching Level 4. Overall, standards in both subjects were slightly above those found nationally, having been significantly below the previous year. At the same time, there has been a whole-school focus on developing the quality of mathematics and science provision to ensure more consistent progress over time and reduce the need for interventions. This has included reviewing what is taught and how, training for staff and, in mathematics, workshops for parents. The school does not yet have data to show the impact on standards and progress across the school, but recent monitoring has shown an improvement in the teaching of mathematics and pupils reporting a greater enjoyment and understanding of their learning.

The school acknowledges that the emphasis on mathematics and science had an adverse impact on standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2 last year, particularly for those pupils who had the potential to achieve Level 5. Senior leaders have accurately identified writing as a whole-school priority this year. They are confident that systems are now sufficiently established to address this while sustaining recent improvements. For example, the school is updating its tracking systems so that all pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science will be checked more regularly. By doing this the school expects that from now on it will pick up and address any underachievement sooner rather than later.

Training for staff and regular, focused monitoring and feedback are improving the quality of teaching, such that over half of lessons observed over the last six months have been good or better. There is evidence of a shift from teachers talking to pupils engaged in activities and discussions. Pupils are particularly positive about those lessons that take a topic approach to make meaningful links between subjects. Regular assessments are now established, even though there is still a perceived need for tests to confirm the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Most teachers are differentiating work to match the different needs and abilities in their classes and evaluating how successful their lessons are. However, there is more to be done to ensure that they are evaluating the learning that has taken place. Increasingly, pupils are involved in assessing their own learning and termly learning conferences provide time for teachers, pupils and their parents to review progress and set goals.



together. Regular achievement team meetings involve all staff in finding solutions to individual pupils' barriers to learning, while the pupil and family support meetings take a holistic approach to supporting more vulnerable pupils. In particular this has had a marked impact on reducing the number of poor attenders.

Senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the school. They are determined to achieve and sustain high quality through embedding good practice rather than quick fixes. They appreciate that some systems still need refining and recognise that ultimately the success of their work will be measured by the progress that pupils make. Staff understand what the school is trying to achieve and are increasingly taking on responsibilities for leading improvement, while governors are well aware of their responsibilities to challenge as well as support. The local authority has not worked closely with the school because senior leaders have chosen to use external consultants. The support from the school improvement partner has been valued, but reports do not always present an accurate picture of the school.

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

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

