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Mr P Karnavas
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Karnavas

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 November 2009, for the time you and your staff gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 2 October 2008, the school was asked to accelerate pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science by having higher expectations, ensure that pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn, check their understanding during lessons and extend the use of pair and group work in lessons.

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

In the year since the Ofsted inspection, pupils' achievement and progress have not improved, and standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 fell sharply in the 2009 national assessments. The federation responded to this drop in standards by undertaking a thorough review along with local authority colleagues. Leadership and management have been strengthened and curriculum provision improved. Quality assurance systems are now rigorous and there is a much greater clarity about what the weaknesses are and what needs to be done to overcome them. A sharply focused improvement plan is now being implemented with urgency and clear direction. However, these changes are relatively recent and the impact cannot yet be seen in improvements in the quality of learning or in pupil progress.

The quality and quantity of work in pupils' books and in lessons is not sufficient to accelerate pupils' progress. Expectations of what pupils can and should be achieving are not high enough. Teachers share learning objectives at the beginning of lessons although a lack of focus on or clarity about what pupils will be learning mean that

opportunities are missed to follow these up or to check on pupils' understanding or progress. Recent curriculum changes are resulting in good use being made of drama and cross-curricular work to spark pupils' interest, and teachers are beginning to plan a broader range of learning activities and reduce the overemphasis on literacy and numeracy.

Despite these efforts to make the learning more lively and interesting, there remains an overemphasis on what adults will do in lessons rather than on what the pupils will learn. There is over-involvement and direction by adults and this is restricting pupils' ability to learn independently. Pupils' communication and language skills remain very low and, although there is some good practice where speaking and listening opportunities are well planned, in most lessons these opportunities are not purposeful enough and the adults generally do far more talking than the pupils.

The school has a strong and successful focus on developing a positive ethos where pupils are well cared for, get on well together and are keen to do well. Relationships, attitudes and behaviour are good and there are good outcomes in aspects of personal development such as being healthy and staying safe. However, other areas are less well developed, due to the limited opportunities for pupils to develop independence in their learning and their low basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Until this academic year, leadership and management were insufficiently rigorous in identifying, challenging and tackling weaknesses. Indeed, until the return of the end of Key Stage 2 assessment results, the extent of the lack of progress was not recognised. There was too little focus on the learning in lessons and too little scrutiny of pupils' work so that the lack of progress was not identified quickly enough.

The local authority has provided a great deal of support to the school over past years and this has resulted in improvements to systems and procedures. However, the impact on the quality of learning and the embedding of good practice in the classrooms is less evident.

The deployment of proven leaders from the highly performing secondary partner school is resulting in greater clarity of purpose, rigour and urgency. Self-evaluation is now accurate and the improvement plan is both challenging and realistic. The overhaul of the curriculum has already begun to introduce more purposeful learning and enjoyment. These early positive signs are grounds for optimism.

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

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector