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Mrs Karen De Pietro
Ridgewell Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs De Pietro

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 16th December 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of Governors who was very helpful. I appreciated the willingness of pupils on the school council to take part in a working lunch and share their honest views about the school. They were a credit to all they represent. It was good to know how much pupils now enjoy writing and that they need more pencils, as they work so hard they wear them down quickly.

The headteacher in post at the time of the last inspection moved to another school at the end of the summer term 2009. The new headteacher takes up her post formally in January 2010. For the autumn term the deputy headteacher has been acting headteacher supported by the governing body and School Improvement Partner.

As a result of the inspection on 23 and 24 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- develop older pupils' independent learning skills so that they can work on their own with greater sense of urgency and purpose
- embed the initiatives in place aimed at raising standards so that they are a consistent feature of teaching and learning across the school
- Broaden pupils' horizons, aspirations and awareness of the diversity of our society through wider cultural and international opportunities.

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.



The number of pupils in each year group taking national tests is small and their abilities range widely. This means data used to compare the school's performance with that of other schools nationally needs to be treated with caution. That said national test results for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 were well above the national average, especially in writing and mathematics, in 2009. This represents a significant improvement on results in the previous year. The school's tracking data and work in books, confirm that these high standards are being sustained within the current Year 2.

In Year 6 the gap between the school's performance and the national average has closed in mathematics over the last two years, although standards remain below average. Pupils do well in science. The school was shocked by the unexpectedly low standards in English in 2009. A thorough investigation was carried out. The school asked the secondary schools to which the pupils transferred to check their teacher assessments of pupils' attainment. In all cases it was agreed that the original teacher assessments that pupils would meet or exceed the national expectation were correct. It has not been possible, despite in depth considerations, to establish why some pupils underperformed in English during the tests, when their performance in other subjects and their day to day work was better. Further analysis shows that the school's targets were impacted when several pupils who had been at the school for some years moved house or school immediately before the tests were taken and others had joined the school at the beginning of Year 6 and had ground to make up.

In the light of these low results the school acted quickly with determination and rigour, implementing a sharply focused improvement plan, especially to raise standards in writing. This is proving successful and the quality of teaching in literacy has increased and is good across the school, enhancing the rate of pupils' progress in writing. Teachers have raised their expectations, as well as those of the pupils about what they should achieve. Pupils know the criteria and what they need to do to reach the next level of the National Curriculum. Throughout the school, teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to write for a range of purposes, and at length, that really capture their interest. Pupils say they really enjoy working in pairs, particularly when offering constructive criticism of one another's work. This helps them write to a high standard and complete a substantial amount of work during each lesson. Consequently pupils express their individual and creative ideas confidently in their written work across the curriculum, as well as in literacy lessons. Frequent assessments enable staff to pick up underachievement at an early stage. Pupils with significant special educational needs are supported effectively so that they too make good progress according to their capabilities. Marking gives pupils a clear idea of what they do well and how they can improve. As a result of these factors the work of pupils in the current Year 6 indicates that they are on course to meet their challenging targets and achieve in line with the national expectation. The school accepts there is more work to be done to ensure that these developments,

including the use of a fluent joined script, impact pupils' achievements consistently over the year.

The school has made faster progress in meeting the key issue to enable pupils to develop their independent learning skills, extending it to all age groups. A particular strength is the way in which pupils, including the youngest, are encouraged through religious education to consider and debate their own questions such as, 'Why was Noah thought to be the only good person on earth?' Pupils are taught how to express and hold their own opinions and to show respect when they explain why they may disagree. These skills are reflected across the creative curriculum especially in work that involved research into life in other countries. They assist in broadening pupils horizons and aspirations, as well as give them confidence to try out ideas, deal with unfamiliar situations in their work and learn from their mistakes. Writing and art work in displays around the school show the many opportunities for pupils to illustrate their innovative, individual and creative ideas. That said there are occasions when staff continue to rely on worksheets or tasks that do little to challenge and extend the chance for pupils' to use their initiative. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning, good behaviour, ability to work cooperatively with others of the same, older or younger age group, their involvement in the appointment of the new headteacher, as well as curriculum and lesson planning contribute much to pupils' developing skills in decision making and future economic well-being.

At the time of the last inspection pupils' personal development and well being, care, guidance and support and the curriculum were judged to be good and this looks to still be the case. The school's capacity to improve was also judged to be good. In the summer of 2009 the school was advised that a change of headteacher and other staff, as well as the drop in standards in English meant this judgement within its self evaluation could only be satisfactory. The governors, acting headteacher and staff acted quickly on this advice. Together with the School Improvement Partner they have been effective in tackling weaknesses, especially in writing, and overcoming barriers to improvement, by working as a team with a clear sense of purpose. The new headteacher, with expertise in literacy, has also been involved in developments since her appointment. The sharply focused improvement plan to raise attainment in writing has driven developments successfully this term and is to be continued for the rest of the year. It is monitored closely by governors for its impact. Performance management targets have been linked to improvements in the quality of teaching of writing and the targets on the school's improvement plan. Staff are reflective and have taken on new ideas willingly, improving their quality of teaching to enhance pupils' progress. Links with other schools and involvement in action research confirm their determination to consider other effective ways to meet pupils' needs. Together with the governors they have an accurate and realistic picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the abilities and progress of pupils in each year group. These factors and the positive impact they are having are ensuring that the school's capacity to improve has remained good despite the challenges it faces.

A check on the school's safeguarding procedures was made during the monitoring visit. They were found to be in line with requirements.

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

Kath Beck
Additional Inspector