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Christine Livings  
Great Witchingham Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Livings

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 October, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass my thanks on to the governors who came in to meet with me at such short notice.

Since the school's last inspection, staffing has been stable. There have been changes within the governing body, including a new acting chairman. Additional funding through the local authority has enabled the school to take on an additional temporary, part-time teacher so that Years 5 and 6 can be taught English and mathematics separately for four mornings each week. The partnership with Easton School has strengthened, with increased joint working of both staff, governors and, where practicable, the pupils. Governors of both schools are currently in the process of consulting parents on their proposals to formally federate the two schools.

As a result of the inspection on 22–23 September 2008, the school was asked to set challenging targets for pupils in Years 3 to 6 in order to accelerate progress in writing, mathematics and science; distribute responsibility for monitoring provision, identifying areas for improvement and raising standards to subject leaders, and involve governors more in monitoring; and to make sure that the marking of pupils' work shows them what they need to do to improve.

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.

Attainment in the Year 6 tests in 2009 was low, and especially so in mathematics. Although the small number in each year group at Great Witchingham can mean inevitably wide fluctuation in standards from year to year, and this group included



some pupils who joined the school partway through Key Stage 2, the school's own analysis shows that these pupils did much less well than they should in relation to their Key Stage 1 assessments. Looking at these pupils' year-to-year progress through the school, however, it is clear that the period of their underachievement was in the years before the last inspection and that their more recent progress had been much better.

Regular assessment in reading, writing and mathematics and the tracking of pupils' progress is showing a similarly improved rate of progress in other year groups, including the current Year 6. The partnership with Easton has helped subject leaders to develop their roles so that they are now better equipped to help to monitor and drive improvements. Monitoring of lessons is also helping teachers to strengthen their practice, but the format used in the school for lesson monitoring risks giving leaders an overly positive view of some lessons. This is because leaders use a checklist which focuses their observations largely on the features of teaching rather than on how well the pupils are learning and making progress. By contrast, governors are using a form that prompts them to look at aspects of pupils' learning and has helped them to pinpoint in lessons where some groups of pupils were not doing as well as they should. Although not all governors are involved in such detailed monitoring, all are benefitting through the reports they share and through the sharing of experience and expectations with their counterparts at Easton, with whom they have been meeting on a regular basis.

The statutory targets that the school originally set for pupils for 2010 were not as challenging as they could be. This was a point picked out in the summer term in the helpful discussions that the school had with its school improvement partner. As a result, more challenging targets have since been set which are very ambitious, especially in comparison with the Year 6 results from previous years. If the school comes close to attaining these, and particularly in relation to the number of pupils targeted to attain Level 5 in English and mathematics, then attainment will have risen very sharply indeed. In tracking each pupil's progress throughout the school, staff now have the expectation that all should be making two sub-levels progress in reading, writing and mathematics over the course of each year. This example of year-on-year targeting has raised teachers' expectations and has helped the school to focus support where any pupils are identified as not doing as well as they should.

Throughout the school, pupils have targets that show them what they need to concentrate on to improve their work. For example, which multiplication tables they should learn. The pupils in Year 5 and 6 have these targets on cards to which they can refer, but in another class the targets are on the wall and so less easily to hand. Targets are matched to age and ability but they are not, in the main, personal to each pupil. Nevertheless, pupils are generally aware of their targets, which is an improvement since the last inspection.

There are examples of very good marking in the school, particularly of written work in English. This is clearly identifying for pupils what they need to do to move their

work on. Marking is not all of this high quality, however. The initiative that the school has taken to introduce grades for presentation is well chosen because there are certainly some able pupils whose work has been let down by untidy presentation. However, this aspect of marking has not been consistently maintained in all classes.

The school has understandably given priority to improving reading, writing and mathematics. Science has so far been given less priority. Until this term, pupils have not, for example, had targets in science, as was recommended in the last inspection report. Although 94% attained Level 4 in the national test results in science in 2009, none of the pupils attained Level 5. Historically, too, the proportion of Level 5s in science has been lower than might be expected. From the small sample of work seen during my visit, it was evident that pupils of widely different abilities had been given very similar work to do in science. Work pitched at an appropriate level for an average ability pupil, frequently offers insufficient challenge to the more able. There are examples in science of an overreliance by staff on unchallenging worksheets. These limit opportunities for more able pupils, in particular, to record work in their own way. There has been a similar overreliance on worksheets in humanities, where, again, more able pupils are not extended as much as they should be.

These points show that, though the school has made reasonable progress since the last inspection, it still has further to go. That is the school's view too. School self-evaluation is accurate and is predicated on the increasingly thorough assessment and analysis of how well the school, and, more important, each pupil, is doing. This is a school where staff all know the pupils very well. The last inspection report identified the many strengths of provision and pupils' personal development, and I could see on my visit that these have been maintained and built upon. The last report judged the school's capacity to improve to be good, as does the school in its self-evaluation. The positive endorsement of parents, clear from questionnaires returned immediately in advance of my visit, shows that there is confidence in continued improvement across the whole school community. The judgement in this letter of satisfactory progress in strengthening capacity for improvement since the last report, should in no way be read as any indication of diminution in capacity.

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

Selwyn Ward  
Additional Inspector