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Mr David Purslow
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Purslow

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 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the chair of governors with whom I met and the pupils I talked to over lunch and around the school.

The school has undergone a period of significant turbulence following the unfortunate death of the headteacher during the spring term 2009. The local authority immediately put in interim arrangements to support the senior leadership of the school until a permanent headteacher was appointed. He took up post from September 2009. This time of uncertainty had a marked impact upon the work of the school.

As a result of the inspection on 8-9 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- accelerate pupils' progress in writing and science to the level of that in mathematics
- secure consistently good teaching, particularly in the level of challenge pupils receive
- ensure staff with leadership responsibility contribute to strategic planning and the checking of standards so that the pace of change can accelerate.

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.

Children start in the Nursery with skills and abilities which are below those expected for their age and they make good progress in all areas of their learning, reaching broadly average standards by the time they start in Year 1. This good progress is not built upon, so that standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are below average. Key



Stage 2 standards had risen at the time of the last inspection with results in mathematics being broadly average and English and science below. In 2009, unvalidated results indicate that standards across all three subjects are low; having fallen to below average and in the case of English, well below. Writing is particularly weak. The school's analysis and evaluation of performance data across all years verifies that pupils are not making sufficient progress, although it does identify improvements in some years. The quality of the provision within the Early Years Foundation Stage remains good.

Writing is improving by giving pupils greater opportunities for them to write with purpose across different subjects. For example pupils were using their experiences from a visit to the Black County Museum to write coherently about life in Victorian Britain. The school rightly recognises that there is still a long way to go.

The school has made a concerted effort to improve the results for pupils who took National Tests in 2009 but there was too much to make up from a legacy of weak teaching and results did not improve. They were however above the values expected at the start of the year. Systems and procedures are in place to ensure greater accountability for staff and subject leaders for the progress pupils make and on the quality of learning. Overall the quality of teaching remains satisfactory although at times pupils are still not sufficiently challenged by their work. Good support has been provided by the local authority, through the deployment of National Strategy subject consultants and school improvement advisers. This has meant that there is a far better understanding of what constitutes good teaching practice and is starting to bring about improvements to the quality of learning. However, staffing absences have meant this has not been as effective as possible.

The new headteacher has made a good start by undertaking an accurate evaluation of the school and identifying the key areas for improvement. This has been used to formulate an appropriate plan to build upon the progress made during the summer term. This demonstrates that the school has the potential to overcome its difficulties and improve. Subject leadership in both mathematics and English has improved since the time of the last inspection with leaders having a better understanding of what is required. They monitor the planning and work across all years within the school and report evaluations back to the headteacher. They also identify key areas for improvement and have contributed significantly to the raising achievement plan. At the time of the inspection the school had clear plans to undergo assessments in English and mathematics which will be used to monitor the progress of pupils and also identify how high pupils are attaining. However while this overview is identifying areas for development, subject leaders have not had sufficient impact to bring about a sustained improvement to the pace of change.

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

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

