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21 October 2009

Mrs V Reid
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Reid

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 pupils for their help during the inspection and to your Vice Chair of Governors for taking time to meet me to discuss her view of the school's progress since the last inspection.

The number on roll is similar to that at the time of the last inspection but pupil mobility is more pronounced. A small number of Traveller pupils has joined the school in the last year. All bar one of the six newly qualified teachers successfully completed their first year of teaching. The school has appointed two more newly qualified teachers this year and one experienced overseas trained teacher has gained qualified teacher status. The local authority has monitored the school's progress since the inspection and provided satisfactory support for school improvement. The leadership team has valued the training and guidance staff have received from consultants to help improve the assessment of pupils' progress and provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. So far, too little support has been provided for teaching and learning in mathematics, although this has now been organised for later this term. The school continues to work successfully with its neighbouring primary schools and in the Creative Partnerships programme.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 October 2008, the school was asked to: improve the quality of teaching so that there is greater consistency and more examples of good teaching; raise standards and improve progress made in mathematics; and, develop further the role of subject leaders, specifically in monitoring and evaluating their subjects, in order to accelerate the pace at which the school is improving.

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

Standards have improved well since the inspection and pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics. Assessment outcomes for pupils who were in Year 2 last year show that more pupils achieved the expected level for their age. Attainment in mathematics improved well and the targets set for pupils at Level 2 and Level 2b+ were reached; they were missed at the higher Level 3. Good improvements were also made by Year 6 pupils in the National Curriculum tests in 2009 and the challenging targets set for mathematics were exceeded at Level 4 and Level 5. There was also an improvement in the proportion of pupils making two levels progress from their starting points in Year 2. Achievement in mathematics is better than it was and attainment is much closer to the national average. Evidence seen in lessons and in pupils' mathematics books confirm that progress is improving, although standards remain below expected levels for many pupils.

The school has established a comprehensive system for tracking progress and this shows that most pupils in each year group are making at least expected progress. Pupil progress meetings are held each half term and these involve the leadership team, inclusion team, class teacher and support staff in analysing progress data and identifying any underachievement. Particular attention is paid to pupils from Black and minority ethnic groups and those who may be learning to speak English or who have special educational needs or disabilities. Pupils who are low attainers or who have fallen behind receive additional support in intervention groups led by teaching assistants. Higher level teaching assistants work successfully with targeted groups in mathematics lessons.

Overall, the school's approach to supporting pupils' personal development and well-being is good. There are many displays around the school celebrating the positive contributions pupils are making, and pupils say they enjoy school. Nevertheless, attendance is not as high as it was at the time of the last inspection and the school missed the target set with the local authority in the last academic year. Leaders appreciate that pupils' persistent absence or irregular attendance is likely to affect their progress adversely. They recognise that a sharper focus on making sure that pupils catch up with any learning they have missed is required. Systems for monitoring absence and rewards for pupils' good attendance are well established but not yet working for everyone.

The quality of teaching has improved steadily since the last inspection. During the monitoring inspection HMI visited six mathematics lessons in which the quality of teaching was either satisfactory or good. Pupils were well-behaved, and most had good attitudes and worked together successfully. The leadership team has supported teachers well in creating positive conditions for effective learning. Greater consistency has been established in the way teachers plan and deliver their lessons. Learning objectives and the steps pupils need to take to be successful in their

learning are shared at the start of lessons. Pupils are grouped appropriately when they are working independently, although the activities provided are not always matched precisely enough to their abilities. Teaching assistants usually provide good support for individuals and groups of pupils.

Strategies have been introduced to help pupils contribute more in lessons, including through evaluating their own responses, but some pupils find it hard to articulate their thinking. At times, teachers are not engaging with all learners and miss opportunities to tackle misconceptions. Teachers use interactive whiteboards to support their explanations but some have yet to exploit their full potential for learning. Marking in mathematics books follows a consistent pattern and regular attentive marking was evident in all the books scrutinised. Some of the comments teachers write for next steps improvement refer more to presentation than mathematics. The leadership team has set a target to achieve a more substantial proportion of good lessons in mathematics. To help achieve this, local authority consultant support is to be introduced to provide further guidance on effective teaching. The school's own lesson monitoring records show that inadequate teaching has been eliminated but the target set for the proportion of good lessons has yet to be achieved.

Strong leadership from the headteacher, recognised in the last inspection, continues to move the school forward well. The excellent partnership with the deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, and the persistent approach to tackling weaknesses has strengthened the school's capacity for further improvement. Teamwork among staff is good and morale is high. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are robust and development planning is sharply focussed on improving provision and achievement. Improvements in the contributions made by middle leaders have helped increase the pace of development. Action plans for subject improvements and a monitoring timetable have been drawn up and middle leaders know what is expected from them. Focused learning walks around the school, evaluations of the quality of teachers' planning, scrutinies of pupils' books and lesson observations are included in the monitoring programmes. Some subject leaders have had the chance to attend professional development courses to strengthen their subject knowledge and management skills. The system of management teams is well established and proving successful in developing aspects of the school's work, such as inclusion. As many of the teaching staff are inexperienced, some leadership and management roles are temporarily held by senior members of staff. Consequently, leaders acknowledge the need for a further review and restructuring of curriculum leadership responsibilities.

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
Rob McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2009