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Mr D McNaught  
Headteacher  
Lowfield Primary School  
London Road  
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Dear Mr McNaught

#### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I made an unannounced visit to inspect your school on 13 October 2009, and for the help and information which you provided during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, the local authority representative, staff and groups of pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to meet with me.

There have been some changes to the school's context since the previous inspection in September 2008. Following retirement of the headteacher at the end of the summer term 2009, the local authority, in partnership with the governing body placed a local authority employed lead headteacher at the school who will remain in post for at least this full academic year. Other changes include three new teachers and two new teaching assistants. There have been some changes to leadership responsibilities, for example the deputy headteacher is no longer a class teacher and has some new responsibilities. For two terms there was a full complement of governors but there are currently three vacancies on the governing body. More than a hundred pupils have joined and/or left the school during the year at times other than the usual times.

As a result of the inspection in September 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate pupils' progress
- ensure leaders and managers at all levels monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school to identify clearly where improvements can be made.

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.

Although there has been limited progress in raising attainment at the end of Year 6, there are some promising signs of improved rates of progress. Attainment at the school was low at the time of the previous inspection and results of Year 6 assessments in 2009 were equally low, particularly in English where the proportion attaining at Level 4 fell by 20% to 43%. Results in mathematics were similar to previous years at 62%. Both results in English and mathematics were below the government's floor target of 65%. Given the very low starting points that are typical at the school, and for this group as a whole, these results represent at least satisfactory progress and for some pupils progress was good. Consideration has to be given to the very high proportion of pupils, almost 30%, who joined the group during the 18 months prior to taking these tests. The school's data indicate that those pupils who were taught at the school for the whole of Key Stage 2 reached standards that were closer to average, and that pupils who joined during Key Stage 2 made at least satisfactory progress. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in the current Year 6 and Year 5 classes are closer to average and that these current groups are on track to reach their appropriately challenging targets. Although the progress that pupils are making over time is at least satisfactory and improving, it remains inconsistent both across the school and for particular groups.

Pupils are making better progress because teaching is more engaging and increasingly becoming better at meeting the needs of all pupils. Support staff are being used increasingly well, by for example, better matching the needs of pupils to the skills of bilingual support staff. The teaching sampled during the inspection confirmed that teaching is being more closely matched to pupils' ability and needs. Where shortcomings have been identified in teaching, this is being remedied through support from senior leaders and from local authority specialist teachers. While teaching is improving, it is not yet consistently well focused to ensure that every pupil is making accelerated progress. For this reason staff have recently refined their tracking and assessments to help them to more finely tailor tasks to the needs of specific groups of pupils. However, this is at the early stages and has yet to impact on the learning and progress made by all pupils.

The recent appointment of an experienced headteacher has galvanised the staff and brought about a renewed enthusiasm for improving outcomes for pupils. The self-evaluation is now detailed and very accurately identifies where improvement is needed. For example, the school has correctly identified the pressing need to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school and the impact of improvement actions are good. The quality of lesson observations is good and routinely identifies where the work of teachers and support staff are accelerating learning and where further improvement is needed. The very detailed analysis of pupil's test results and progress overtime is



being used well to identify where progress has not been as strong and where further work is needed.

Although there have been some significant changes to staffing, there is evidence that recent improvements are having an impact and demonstrate some improved capacity for further improvement. The improved and rigorous self-evaluation, greater clarity in the roles of middle leaders and recent changes to timetables and daily routines are all having a positive impact on learning. A recent success has been in improving aspects of pupils' personal and social development by, for example the use of lunchtimes to allow pupils from different age and ethnic groups to eat and play together in a more structured way. As a consequence, pupils say that lunchtimes and the afternoons that follow are more enjoyable and that the behaviour of pupils is much improved.

The school is receiving some good support from the local authority, which has identified the school as a school causing concern. Support to date has included the placing of an experienced lead headteacher at the school and support from specialist teacher advisers are helping to improve the quality of teaching.

Overall, there is a clear sense of direction, strong leadership and a desire to improve. Improvements to the quality of teaching, close tracking of progress and the use of assessment data to support pupils who need extra help are all having a positive impact. However, there is, as yet, still a gap between improvements in provision and its discernable impact on the attainment of pupils.

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

Amraz Ali  
Her Majesty's Inspector