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10 December 2009

Mr John Henderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Henderson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As at the time of the last inspection, the executive headteacher of the federation has continued to spend a large proportion of his time at the Canklow site. Funding to sustain the federation has been secured until 2014 and staff and pupils moved into the new school building in June 2009. While internally all works are completed, some work on the outside areas still has to be finished.

As a result of the inspection in September 2008, the school was asked to raise attainment in English, mathematics and science, improve attendance, ensure teaching was consistently good and improve aspects of provision in the Early Years Foundation stage.

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

Outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage show a clear trend of improvement. The number of children reaching a good level of overall achievement rose significantly in 2009 and children's progress in developing their language and mathematical skills is accelerating. External moderation in 2009 confirmed the accuracy of the school's assessment.

At Key Stage 1, attainment is also rising. The school is continuing to successfully narrow the gap between pupils' attainment and national averages in reading and mathematics with the improved attainment in writing achieved in 2008 sustained in 2009. Compared to similar pupils nationally, attainment overall was significantly above average in 2009.

At Key Stage 2, attainment rose in 2009 in both mathematics and science, with all pupils gaining the nationally expected Level 4 in these two subjects. In English, there was a slight decline in attainment particularly in writing. This has been identified as a whole-school priority for the current year. Pupils' progress is good in mathematics and science, and satisfactory in English. However, despite this positive picture of pupils' progress, and improving standards, attainment remains significantly lower in English and science. The school understands the importance of the need for further rapid improvement in attainment. A significant contributory factor to rising outcomes has been the widespread use of well targeted help for individuals, small groups and entire classes. However, the school appropriately recognises that ensuring consistently good or better classroom teaching in all years is the key to building capacity further and sustaining recent improvements.

Pupils' learning and the progress seen in lessons reflected the school's view that teaching is improving. Teachers were observed to choose engaging contexts and incorporate a wide range of learning activities, including the effective use of information and communication technologies. Resources were of a consistently high quality and their use carefully planned. These approaches and resources successfully captured pupils' interest and consequently, the vast majority of pupils demonstrated good attitudes to their learning and a willingness to produce their best work. Relationships between pupils and adults were positive and support for individuals and small groups by additional adults was effective. Regular enrichment activities for all classes are helping to bring the curriculum to life and increasing pupils' enjoyment of learning. Classroom and corridor displays showcase pupils' achievement in their work and reflect the increasing breadth of learning experiences.

Strategies to improve attendance have been very successful. The number of pupils identified as persistent absentees has been significantly reduced and the school has met its local authority target for attendance. Month-by-month comparisons for attendance in 2008 and 2009 confirm sustained improvements. Attendance has a high profile throughout the school including the Early Years Foundation Stage. Rewards, such as those for good class attendance, are enthusiastically contested and celebrated. Concerns regarding attendance are swiftly identified and parental support secured. Weekly newsletters include attendance information and the link between good attendance and achievement is regularly reinforced.

The move to a well resourced single unit for Early Years Foundation Stage provision has had a significant impact on the quality of learning experience that can be provided for children both indoors and outside. The Early Years Foundation Stage team has been proactive in identifying and embracing best practice and in continuing

to develop their skills and knowledge through a range of professional development opportunities. Weekly joint planning sessions underpinned by outcomes of ongoing assessment are ensuring a closer match of activities to children's learning needs and better balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Strategies to involve parents in learning alongside their children at school are becoming increasingly popular. Recently introduced diaries are promoting home-school dialogue and providing parents' with further support for extending learning at home.

When the school was last inspected, it was judged to have good capacity to make the necessary improvement. This good capacity has been demonstrated in the school's good progress so far in addressing the identified areas for improvement. However, much of this improvement has been driven by the executive headteacher, who has not only overseen the strategic leadership of the school, but has also contributed to improving outcomes in classrooms at Key Stage 2 by working alongside other colleagues. The good classroom skills of the head of school have also been effective in contributing to improved outcomes at Key Stage 1. Progress has been made in clarifying leadership roles and responsibilities and in ensuring a shared vision for the future of the school. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen and all staff are strongly committed to enhancing pupils' achievement and enjoyment. However, the executive headteacher is aware that more needs to be done to ensure all leaders and managers are making a full and sustained contribution to developing provision, raising attainment and improving outcomes for pupils.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector