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Mr C Metcalfe
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Metcalfe

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 with my colleague Kath Harris, additional inspector. We appreciate the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the visit. I am grateful to a member of the governing body and your School Improvement Partner for sparing the time to meet with me. It was a pleasure to speak to pupils in lessons and around the school, so please pass on our thanks to them also.

Since the last inspection, three teachers have left the school and four newly qualified teachers joined the staff team at the start of the autumn term.

As a result of the inspection on 13 and 14 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in reading and writing so more pupils make the progress of which they are capable
- improve the quality of teaching so it is more effective in helping pupils to make progress as they move through the school
- develop the quality and contribution of middle leaders' monitoring and evaluation in the raising of whole-school achievement.

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.

The Early Years Foundation Stage was judged good at the last inspection. Although children made good progress by the time they entered Year 1, it was acknowledged that pupils' communication, language and literacy skills remained the weakest aspect of their development. Concerted efforts to tackle this have resulted in a significant improvement in these skills for the pupils who entered Year 1 this term. Key Stage 1 assessments in 2009 showed that Year 2 pupils reached overall standards in line with national averages. This indicated good improvement in pupils' reading and writing skills which had been below average.

The unvalidated 2009 Key Stage 2 test results reversed the previous two-year trend of low standards of attainment for 11-year-olds. Overall performance in English, mathematics and science was in line with national averages. Although the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 in these subjects remained below average, this still exceeded the school's predicted success rate based on previous years. Taking into account pupils' prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, the 2009 results represented significant improvement and at least good 'value added' progress. Of this cohort of 55 pupils, 32 were girls and their progress was even more marked than that of the boys. The school analyses the achievement of different groups of pupils closely, and is satisfied that boys' progress is also accelerating, mainly due to the improvements in teaching and an increased emphasis on active learning strategies. Leaders are aware of the need to continue to monitor this if they are to reach their challenging targets for the coming years, for example, as the current Year 6 has a higher proportion of boys.

The school has responded well to the issues identified at the last inspection. Senior leaders and staff are fully committed to pursuing these key priorities in order to raise standards and improve achievement for all pupils. Rigorous monitoring of the school's provision, most particularly of the quality of teaching and learning, makes a good contribution to accurate self-evaluation. This has enabled not only leaders and managers but all staff to have a clear view of the impact of actions taken to improve the rate of pupils' learning and progress. Lessons observed during this visit confirm the school's view that the proportion of good or better teaching has improved since the last inspection. Work across the school to improve pupils' reading and writing skills includes regular and direct teaching of phonics, with skilled teaching assistants playing a full part in these sessions with groups of pupils from Reception to Year 3. Well planned daily guided reading activities take place throughout the school, and weekly opportunities for extended writing enable pupils to practise their skills in a range of writing genres. Pupils in Key Stage 2, for example, understand that the teachers' detailed marking of their writing will identify strengths and point them clearly to ways of improving their next piece of writing.

Key factors in the school's positive improvements since the last inspection are the senior leadership's high expectations and attention to detail, and the good quality of communication across the school. All staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and teachers understand that they are accountable for the progress

made by pupils in their care. There is a well understood 'calendar of events' for all self-evaluation activities so that staff are well prepared for important milestones in the school's plans for development. Rigorous systems for recording and tracking pupils' achievement builds on the well managed assessment procedures. These provide accurate information from which teachers and leaders can identify any underachievement and inform future lesson planning.

Middle leaders' contribution to monitoring and evaluation has strengthened considerably as their experience and skills have grown. Several subject leaders presented an overview of progress in their areas of responsibility during a staff and governor conference at the end of the last school year. Middle leaders are given dedicated time to carry out their responsibilities. For example, the literacy and numeracy leaders work well together. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning are enabling them to identify common strengths and areas to develop across both subjects. They have developed year group action plans based on their findings, in order to plan appropriate professional development opportunities for staff. Staff meetings focus on key areas for improvement. Information from monitoring activities is used well to identify groups or individual pupils who would benefit from the range of intervention strategies designed to boost their progress. It is also used to inform performance management systems as part of the school's well established cycle of review.

The local authority has provided effective additional support and challenge to the school during the last year, in line with its policy to monitor schools judged satisfactory and/or with a headteacher new to the local authority. Primary Strategy consultants have provided school-based training in areas for development. Some staff have attended training in using the 'Letters and Sounds' programme, and the positive impact of this can be seen in the teaching of phonics skills. Evidence from this monitoring visit supports the local authority's view that the school makes the most of every opportunity to continually improve its provision and strive for excellence. Aspects of its work are rightly recognised as examples of best practice, for example in school self-evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Marguerite McCloy
Her Majesty's Inspector