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Mrs Billingsley
Birchen Coppice Primary School
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Dear Mrs Billingsley

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 September and 1 October 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, the local authority adviser and all the pupils for talking with me about the school.

Since the last inspection, one teacher has resigned and another has retired. The staffing situation is now stable and subject leader responsibilities have been allocated to individual members of staff, which is helping to share leadership responsibilities more widely across the school. The school is currently in a transition phase as construction work has begun on building a completely new school, which is scheduled for completion in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 12-13 January 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve pupils' achievement and standards in English and mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 2, by increasing the proportion of good teaching
- improve the levels of attendance especially for those pupils who regularly do not come to school
- improve the accommodation and outdoor learning environment for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The changes that have taken place since the last inspection have resulted in a staff that is working well to improve matters. The stronger leadership team has increased the pace of change and focused on resolving improvement priorities. There is a clear and appropriate emphasis on tracking pupils' progress and a greater sense of accountability. The school's unvalidated 2009 Key Stage 2 data shows that standards in English, mathematics and science are still well below the national average.

Similarly, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics are also well below the national average. These low results, although anticipated by the school, were a disappointment and did not reflect the fact that the majority of pupils made satisfactory or better progress during the year.

The previous poor behaviour of a minority of pupils and the high levels of absenteeism limited the extent of pupils' achievement. The school's efforts to overcome these challenges are being successful. Pupils' behaviour in the school has improved significantly and there is a stronger work ethic in classes and a greater desire to learn. Staff are better able to focus on delivering lessons that enable pupils to make faster progress. The quality of teaching is variable but satisfactory overall. There is a greater emphasis on planning lessons that build on pupils' prior experiences and organising activities that interest and motivate them. Teaching assistants are used well to support groups of pupils, often those who need additional help and support enabling them to make better progress. The use of information and communication technology has developed well and teachers are using programs that pupils enjoy and, importantly, helps them to learn. However, the presentation and quality of pupils' work are variable because not all teachers make their expectations explicit and they do not challenge pupils sufficiently to strive for higher standards. Although pupils' work is marked regularly the comments are frequently of limited value. This is because they do not always help pupils understand how they can improve their work and because many pupils are unable to read what has been written.

The school has been supported well by the local authority to address and raise attendance levels. A number of initiatives have been implemented and others are planned with the result that the number of pupils who are persistent absentees has declined and pupils' attendance is showing signs of improving.

The accommodation and the outdoor learning environment, for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, has improved and now provides an area that can be used to inspire and develop children's curiosity. The Foundation Stage leader has bid successfully for funds and, working with the local authority, organised the development and installation of a good range of new equipment and arranged for dangerous walls to be removed.

The statement of action produced by the local authority following the last inspection was generally appropriate as was the school's improvement plan. The current action plan is of a very similar quality. It identifies relevant success criteria that can be used to evaluate progress being achieved against each improvement priority. The local authority is monitoring the school's development regularly and producing useful reports that provide accurate evaluations of the progress being achieved. The level of support and guidance provided by the local authority has been very good and in line with what was proposed in the post inspection action plan.

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

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector