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Mrs Jane Long
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Long

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 20 October 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the staff for taking the time to meet with me; they were very helpful in outlining the improvements made. Discussions with the senior leadership team and local authority were also very helpful in evaluating the progress the school has made.

The school has gone through a particularly turbulent time over the past year. A seconded headteacher from a local primary school took up post in September 2008, as the substantive headteacher was on long-term sick leave. Financial difficulties were also apparent and a considerable overspend was predicted.

As a result of the inspection on 20-21 January 2009, the school was asked to ensure that teaching and the progress made by all learners, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are at least satisfactory; to improve the consistency of assessment in all age groups, to measure and guide pupils' learning and progress; and develop teachers' specialist skills to meet the full range of pupils' needs throughout the school.

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

Through the headteacher's and governors' considerable efforts, and with good local authority support, the allocation of staffing of the school has been reviewed so that a balanced budget can be achieved. This process has been managed well. Despite some difficult decisions having to be made, staff morale is high and there is a



determined effort for school improvement and to provide the best for pupils. The seconded headteacher has now been appointed as the permanent headteacher, a new senior leadership team focused on teaching and learning is in place, and governors now have a good range of expertise which support aspects of the school's work. The pupils are just about to move into new, purpose-built, up-to-date accommodation, something which has taken a considerable amount of the headteacher's time.

The local authority took decisive and swift action to support the school in addressing all the issues from the last inspection. Good support has been provided and staff have been trained in meeting the needs of the diverse school roll. Staff are clearly more confident about supporting pupils' behaviour, their learning and development and in meeting their physical or sensory needs. No local authority statement of action plan was available for the inspection, although the local authority states it has received an evaluation of this from Ofsted.

The school has worked hard to address the tracking of pupils' progress and to set up assessment systems that have increased staff's awareness of the levels pupils are working at. As a result, they are much more aware of the progress that pupils are making. Clear systems are in place across the school from Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6. Decisive action has been taken to introduce and develop a progress tracking system which is clear to all staff and which allows the school to identify whether pupils are on track to reach their targets. The accuracy of target setting has also increased as the school is now using national guidance and is clear what should be expected of pupils. In addition, the school has supplemented its information about how it assesses pupils who are at a very early stage using a nationally produced developmental journal, which is good practice.

Staff are now using guidance rigorously to make their assessments and to keep a close eye on the very small steps of progress that most pupils will make in literacy and numeracy. The school has recognised that systems need to extend to include pupils' personal development and information and communication technology, and this is planned for the near future. Staff have started to check samples of work so there is common agreement in the school about the assessments made and the levels stated. As a next step, it is meeting with schools in the locality to undertake a similar process of moderation. Of considerable value are the staff discussions around each pupil's progress and the strategies which come from this to support their further progress. The senior leadership team have good oversight of this. Sometimes the actions are not worded sharply enough to focus precisely on the outcomes for pupils.

Teaching has improved and in the lessons seen was satisfactory and occasionally good. Learning and pupils' progress have also improved and are satisfactory. The headteacher has tackled weakness in teaching and provided support where necessary. There is a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching as a result of the headteacher's and senior team's monitoring. Most teachers have



responded positively to the help given. Some staff have now left the school and since January 2009 a significant number of new teachers have joined Fort Royal. The process for inducting them into the school's systems has been good. The school's focus on support for pupils' communication means that the use of signs, symbols and objects of reference are now regularly used in lessons, although the senior team recognise there is still some way to go to gain consistent use across school.

Staff are now able to identify in their planning the things that different pupils in their classes will do and learn, although some do this more precisely than others. Lesson objectives are mostly clear but a few lesson plans still focus more on the activity rather than on what is to be learnt from it. Work is reasonably matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Relationships between staff and pupils are good and pupils clearly enjoy lessons. Behaviour is managed well and staff are aware of the possible reactions from some pupils and have effective strategies to deal with them. Some good examples of this were seen during the inspection, where teaching assistants followed the strategies through in a consistent and rigorous manner. While assistants are used very productively during the practical part of lessons, there are missed opportunities for them to support learning during introductions and ends of lessons. There is increasing use of technology to support learning and communication, although there are still missed opportunities in lessons to do this.

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

George Derby
Additional Inspector

