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Nicola Harwood
Headteacher
Richard Lee Primary School
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Dear Mrs Harwood

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 7 July, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. In particular, pass on my thanks to Debbie your Chair of Governors who came in to discuss the school's progress with me at such short notice.

Since the last inspection in July 2008, eight teachers have left the school and four have joined the staff. There is a new information and communication technology (ICT) technician, office manager and assistant headteacher. At the last inspection, falling roles had resulted in the school being re-organised with only two classes in each year. With increasing pupil numbers, since September 2009 the school has returned to three classes in each year group. The school population has changed and there are now a lot more pupils who join the school other than at the usual time. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is declining.

As a result of the inspection on 9 -10 July 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the consistency of teaching, particularly in marking and planning to meet the needs of all groups of pupils in the class
- develop those middle leaders who lack the skills to monitor, evaluate and plan to raise standards in the subject they co-ordinate
- plan more opportunities for pupils to develop their investigative skills in science.

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.



Attainment on entry to the Nursery has been broadly average for a number of years but is now declining with more children in need of support for their communication, language and literacy skills. At the last inspection, when pupils left the school in Year 6, their attainment was broadly average. Attainment declined in 2008 and 2009 and was below average at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Current data suggests that attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is now average. Whilst attainment is still below national averages in Key Stage 1, the decline in attainment at Key Stage 2 has been halted and there are strong signs that attainment and progress are improving, especially in mathematics. Year 6 moderated assessments in 2010 show that attainment is now broadly average again. All groups of pupils now make satisfactory progress from their starting points as they move through the school. In 2009, they made better progress in English than in science and mathematics. The concerted focus on improving whole school attainment in mathematics this year has been successful, and the 2010 teacher assessments now show that all groups of pupils made better progress and have attained higher standards in mathematics. This is particularly significant as increasing numbers of pupils join the school other than at the normal time. Since September 2009, 34 pupils have joined the school, 15 with no or little English. Fifteen pupils joined Year 5 and Year 6.

Attendance, at 93.5%, has declined since the last inspection and is now below the national average of 94.5%. The main causes of poor attendance are specific family issues, and the fact that some parents choose to take their children on holiday in term time despite the advice given by the school. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress and makes it difficult for them to catch up.

In order to improve the quality of teaching, marking and lesson planning, the school has used the local authority lead teachers to support teachers in Key Stage 2. Lesson observations are now a more regular feature of management activities. This monitoring is contributing to improving the quality of teaching. A new marking policy was introduced in March 2009 where teachers annotate work in pink to celebrate pupils' work and use a green pen to show what pupils have to do next to improve their work. This policy is becoming more consistent throughout the school and is appreciated by all pupils who are proud of the positive pink comments they receive. Paired observations carried out with the headteacher as part of this visit demonstrated that the quality of teaching is still not consistently good enough and varied from outstanding to inadequate. There is now more consistency in the quality of teaching and marking in Key Stage 2, although there remains some inconsistency in teaching in Key Stage 1. In the best lessons, no opportunity is missed to engage pupils in purposeful learning. Wall displays are of high quality and celebrate achievement as well as being a useful learning stimulus. However, in the less successful lessons teachers talk too much and the pace of learning is slow. Insufficient emphasis is placed on questioning pupils to gauge their level of understanding or extend learning. Wall displays are tired, uninspiring and rarely referred to. Teachers' planning is thorough and extensive, although too often, places insufficient emphasis on the main learning purpose of the lesson. As a consequence,

lessons become a collection of activities rather than a progressive series of learning opportunities.

The headteacher and senior leaders have re-energised the staff and provided some high profile training since the last inspection for middle leaders to develop their leadership and management skills. They have been given the opportunity, for example, of being in charge of the day-to-day running of the school while the senior leaders have been out of school or interviewing for new posts. This has enhanced middle leaders' confidence and self-esteem and is improving their skills in monitoring, evaluating and planning for improvements in their subject areas. The role of middle leaders has also been redefined which has resulted in a shift from subject coordination, to the broader leadership and management of a key area. Some aspiring middle leaders are undertaking specific middle management training run by the local authority or the National College of Leadership. However, whilst there is stronger devolved leadership across the school and accountability, whole school development planning lacks sufficient measurable success criteria from which to measure the impact of management actions in raising attainment and to enable governors to hold the school to account.

Training has been provided for teachers to help them develop investigative skills in science, some led by the science coordinator. Whilst it was not possible to observe any investigative science on this visit, discussion with pupils revealed that some science lessons now contain practical investigations. One Year 2 pupil spoke of how the class had planted seeds and a Year 6 pupil how they had explored the effects of different environments on cups of frozen water. In Year 6, attainment in science improved in 2009 from a low base in 2008, and whilst still below the national average, indicates that the more practical approach is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes.

The local authority has provided satisfactory support to the school. Whilst there have been good regular termly meetings, the classroom support required has not always been available due to local authority staff workload.

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

Clive Kempton HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector