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Miss J Connell
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Connell

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 February 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the three Year 6 pupils, to the chair of governors and to the representative from the local authority who gave up their time to talk to me at short notice.

Since the inspection in 2008, there have been several staff and organisational changes. The pupils are now in single-age classes. The school has appointed experienced and newly qualified teachers to replace staff who have left. The senior management team was restructured at the end of the autumn term 2009. The local authority is working with the school to sustain improvement and raise standards overall.

As a result of the inspection in February 2008, the school was asked to raise standards in mathematics; to ensure the quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 is consistently effective; to improve lesson planning and the deployment of teaching assistants; and, to improve the provision and pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

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.

Current data from tests and teachers' assessments indicate that standards in mathematics are on the rise, albeit slowly. However, there is considerable ground to make up not only in mathematics but also in reading and writing. The school's results in mathematics dipped in the 2008 and 2009 national tests to well below

September 2009



average. In 2009, the Year 6 boys were a year behind, although a few did well and most made satisfactory progress overall at Key Stage 2. The school recognises that some pupils reacted negatively to the test situation and had also been unsettled by staffing changes during the school year. There was also a dip in Year 2 pupils' performance in mathematics after a rise in 2008 brought standards to just below average. Again, it was predominantly boys who did not do as well as they should. The school is aware of the dual need to tackle the legacy of gaps in learning and to accelerate current learning if standards are to rise significantly. It is using additional programmes to support pupils in reading, writing and mathematics including one to one tuition for pupils in Year 6, which in 2009 was effective in ensuring that nearly all target pupils reached the level expected for their age.

In mathematics, the weakness remains in pupils' lack of ready facility with number. This is most apparent at Key Stage 2. Pupils follow procedures to solve number problems and often get things right, but find it harder to decide for themselves how best to tackle a problem. Gaps in basic knowledge and skills also typify pupils' writing where there are errors in spelling and in the use of punctuation. There are positive signs that the younger pupils are gaining a feel for number. Practical experiences, such as shopping, are helping to secure accurate counting and an awareness of how to solve simple problems. Challenges, weekly problems and quick-fire sessions of mental mathematics are developing older pupils' confidence in handling number. Staff have acted on guidance from local authority consultants to strengthen their assessment of pupils' progress, lesson planning and the marking of pupils' work. While a positive step, there is inconsistency. Planning does not always identify clearly the steps needed to ensure pupils' learning. Although staff make effective use of activities and resources, including interactive whiteboards, there is scope to strengthen their questioning skills especially in prompting pupils to explain their thinking. The school is aware that pupils' often limited language skills hinder their performance across the curriculum. It has been slow to pinpoint exactly the words and elements of mathematics that pupils find the most taxing and where focused teaching would result in quick returns.

Pupils are acquiring basic skills in ICT. The impending upgrade of ICT systems and equipment together with ongoing training for staff offers increased potential for pupils to use ICT as a learning tool across the curriculum.

Parents' and pupils' comments indicate how well the school has sustained its strong pastoral focus. Care and concern typify the work of all as do the skilful management of lively pupils and the positive impact of teaching assistants in working with groups and individuals and also in leading support programmes. Pupils enjoy school; attendance has dipped because of the absence and lateness of a small number of pupils.

The headteacher knows the staff and pupils well. She has an accurate overview of the school's needs and is making effective use of local authority services to support the staff, pupils and their families. Governors have appointed staff whose expertise

widens what the school can offer. There is a shared wish to ensure the pupils do well.

Progress to date has been in establishing the structures, systems and practices that enable the school to direct its own improvement. This has partly dealt with one of the areas for improvement in the citizenship subject survey inspection of January 2009 and strengthened the school's capacity to sustain improvement. Senior staff appreciate that the programme of improvement now needs to accelerate with an increased shift to a focus on pupils' learning and continuing effective support from the local authority. The school development plan identifies relevant priorities and action to be taken. The expected impact and the expected outcomes for pupils are not defined well enough to allow staff and governors to gauge the effectiveness of action taken.

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

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector