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28 June 2010

Mrs S Bowker  
Acting Headteacher  
Swanmead Community School  
Ditton Street  
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Dear Mrs Bowker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 June 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the staff and pupils whom I met.

Following the last inspection an Acting Headteacher has been appointed and has been in post since April 2009. The school management and leadership team has been given new roles to help distribute responsibilities more evenly and increase leadership capacity within the school. The adverse consequences of long-term illnesses have been addressed and reliance on supply teachers has been much reduced.

As a result of the inspection on 8 July 2008, the school was asked to

- increase the rate of progress pupils make, particularly in Years 5 and 6
- improve behaviour by ensuring teachers manage it consistently
- involve parents and carers further in their children's learning
- use tracking data to ensure that pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work
- monitor the work of the school more rigorously so that leaders at all levels know exactly what needs to be improved.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress both in making improvements and in demonstrating a good capacity for sustained improvement.

The 2009 mathematics national test results at the end of Year 6 were below average and indicated low levels of progress. Since the inspection, pupils are making better progress as a result of improvements the school has made to teaching and learning. This is most evident in Years 5 and 6 in English and mathematics where pupils are now making good progress. Pupils spoke very positively about the level of challenge they experience in lessons. This is because teachers are paying much more attention to enabling them to reach the highest level, particularly in English and mathematics. The school is much more accurately assessing pupil progress. Good support is provided for those pupils in danger of falling behind. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

The Acting Headteacher ensures that the school's plans communicate a clear set of priorities and high ambition. Pupils' progress is now reviewed more regularly and steps are being taken to ensure teacher assessments are reliable. Good partnership work with the local first school has resulted in a smoother transition for pupils to Swanmead so that pupils make faster progress than before. Assessment information is analysed increasingly well, for instance to regularly check the school is on course to reach its targets. Crucially, this information is being used to hold teachers to account for the progress their pupils make. The school's senior management and leadership team are ensuring that the enthusiasm of staff is well directed towards improvement.

The emphasis on increased accountability has been matched by the development of improved approaches to learning and the management of behaviour in lessons. The results of this were apparent in the lessons observed during the visit. Lessons include succinct learning objectives. Teachers link these directly to pupils' targets using criteria that are sometimes generated by the pupils. Teachers apply the school's behaviour policy consistently and in lessons observed the techniques used were successful in keeping pupils engaged productively in their work.

Teachers are now using assessment to design activities for different ability groups. Teachers regularly review learning as the lesson develops in order to check on pupils' understanding and further clarify the required outcomes. In the more effective lessons teachers are targeting questions on specific groups of learners and have adopted strategies that require all pupils to consider their responses. Evidence was seen of teachers modifying plans in lessons in the light of pupils' responses. Teachers are sensitively recognising that pupils have covered some topics previously and take account of this in their teaching.

Pupils' work is regularly marked and good comments to help pupils improve are included. These comments link to individual targets and teachers ensure pupils respond to these suggestions. The levels pupils are expected to attain are stated in

the front of pupils' books. In the best practice seen, pupils and teachers are highlighting when there is evidence of levels being attained. Parents and carers have had more opportunities to talk with teachers about their child's learning and there have been well-attended seminars on different aspects of the school's work. Their views are more regularly sought through questionnaires and responses to these indicate a much more positive parental view of the school and its developments.

The quality of support provided by those external to the school is good. The local authority consultants and the School Improvement Partner are providing good support that is helping the school improve. The school is part of a partnership with other local schools and work within this is also enabling the school to improve provision.

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

Peter Limm  
Her Majesty's Inspector