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Mr Stephen Bardon  
Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School  
Denstone Road  
Rocester  
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Dear Mr Bardon

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 16 June 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your pupils for taking the time to talk to us.

Following the last inspection, the school had an acting headteacher for two terms; the current substantive headteacher has been in post since April 2009. Pupil numbers have reduced and the school has dropped from three to two form entry.

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

- raise standards and achievement, particularly of more able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- establish a staffing structure that fully meets the needs of the school
- improve the quality of teaching to the highest level by focusing sharply on the quality of learning in lessons and the progress being made by all pupils
- establish a whole school system for accurately tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their performance
- improve the capacity of middle leaders in the school to fulfil their leadership roles, particularly in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of work in their subjects.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

satisfactory progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



In 2009, attainment at the end of Year 8 was above average and the majority of pupils made at least expected progress in English, mathematics and science. Attainment and progress were particularly strong in mathematics. The school has yet to finalise its attainment and progress data for current Year 8 pupils but the most recent tracking data suggests that attainment will remain above average.

The recruitment of a new headteacher and the restructuring of staff roles and responsibilities, including those at senior leadership level, have considerably strengthened the capacity of the leadership team to deliver school improvement. Coherent systems for monitoring the work of the school have been put in place. Faculty self-evaluation is accurate and robust and middle leaders are held accountable for the progress of pupils within their department. There are now ambitious strategic development plans at whole school and faculty level. Governors have developed their role and are working with senior leaders to produce more measurable success criteria for the development plan that will support them in more rigorous monitoring of school improvement.

There have been significant improvements in the way that the school gathers and makes use of assessment information. The school's new tracking system has been effective in highlighting underachievement and increasing staff expectations of the performance of all pupils. Faculty and pastoral leaders are increasingly confident in using assessment data to develop focussed intervention strategies for individual pupils.

Senior and middle leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning and all lessons are now satisfactory or better. There has been a strong emphasis this year on improving the range of learning activities in lessons to meet the differing learning styles of pupils and the success of this strategy was evident during the inspection. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable and plan appropriate, relevant and interesting lessons for their pupils. However, not enough use is made of information on pupils' prior attainment to plan appropriately challenging activities for all ability levels. Teachers make good use of frequent questioning to check learning. However, there are fewer examples of more challenging questions that develop and extend pupils' learning. Pupils lack clear guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils behave very well and apply themselves diligently; relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. Pupils are interested in their learning and engaged by the activities. They have high levels of self confidence and are happy to ask questions.

Local authority consultants have provided effective support to assist the school in developing the strategies used by middle leaders to monitor and evaluate their faculties. They continue to provide support to these leaders on the development of assessment strategies. Partnership activities between local schools have enhanced pupils' interest in reading and provide opportunities for teachers to share best practice.



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

Deborah James  
Lead Inspector

