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Mr Jeremy Weedon  
Acting headteacher  
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Dear Mr Weedon

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 2 March 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff, governors and pupils for their help. In particular, I would like to thank the governors, Mr O'Byrne and Reverend Marshall, and Mrs Adams from the local authority for coming into school to meet me.

The previous headteacher and two full-time members of staff left the school at the end of the academic year 2008/9. An acting headteacher and two new teaching staff who are both on temporary contracts have been in place since September 2009. The school moved from seven single-aged classes to six classes with mixed-age groups in Reception, Year 1, 2 and 3. Immediately following the inspection, there was a fall in the numbers on roll but more recently this has been reversed. The governing body has undergone considerable change with a new chair, vice-chair and three other new governors.

As a result of the inspection on 17-18 June 2009, the school was asked to:

- urgently improve the capacity of senior leadership in order to drive up standards and raise achievement more quickly
- strengthen procedures to allow governors to monitor more thoroughly and hold the school to account more critically
- ensure that monitoring of teaching, tracking of pupils' progress and analysis of data are more rigorous in identifying and remedying key weaknesses.



Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. This is because the pace of improvement has not been sufficient to rectify the major weaknesses in the school. While the views of staff, governors, pupils and parents confirm that the 'atmosphere' in school has greatly improved, the visit has raised serious concerns about the overall capacity to improve and I recommend a revisit.

The scale of the weaknesses in the school was not fully realised until the arrival of the acting headteacher, who was faced with major issues that required immediate resolutions. For example, swift attention had to be given to the damaged relationships between the school, parents and carers, and members of the local community. As a consequence of the actions which were taken, governors and parents and carers now refer to positive improvements in communication. They also report that they feel more involved in the life of the school. Previously, class teachers had worked in isolation and as a consequence the acting headteacher urgently implemented some basic systems and procedures. As a result, teachers now work together as a team. An example of this is the consistent approach which has been adopted with the marking of pupils' books. Teaching staff have experienced a steep learning curve as they broaden their knowledge of pupils' achievement and this has required additional guidance, training and support.

The original inspection reported that pupils left the school with broadly average standards and some had made satisfactory progress. However, national published data show that pupils in 2009 left the school with standards that were below the national average. This data also indicated that pupils made significantly less progress than was expected from Key Stage 1 to 2 over a three-year period. First-hand evidence from the monitoring visit supports this view and confirms that standards are below age-related expectations at the end of Key Stage 2. The school has not taken fast enough action to remedy this situation and it is only in the past few weeks that well-considered strategies, albeit well considered, have been implemented to help raise standards.

Senior and middle leaders are enthusiastic and keen to develop their roles. They are being well supported through ongoing training programmes. Nevertheless, their work is new and the accuracy of their evaluation of the evidence they now gather is not yet secure. For example, teachers have worked hard at establishing systems for monitoring pupils' progress and identifying underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there has been a lack of urgency in using this information to identify key weaknesses and make improvements. The introduction of rigorous intervention strategies to tackle the legacy of underachievement has been slow. This indicates that the capacity of leadership to drive up standards and raise pupils' achievement is not yet evident.

Governors are extremely supportive of the school and have recently embarked on a number of training courses. The production of their 'governor dossier' is helping



them to have a greater understanding of their role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Nevertheless, they are not, as yet, fully holding the school to account and challenging the underachievement of the pupils.

The monitoring of teaching remains a significant weakness. Lessons have been observed but insufficient use is made of the information gathered to identify areas requiring improvement. Teaching remains satisfactory but is not consistently good enough to rectify pupils' extensive underachievement. There is still too much time spent talking to the pupils and teacher expectations are not always high enough. For example, poorly presented work is readily accepted by some teachers. Across the school, the consistent approach to lesson planning ensures that the acting headteacher is informed of curriculum coverage. However, in some classes, there is an over-reliance on worksheets and this highlights weaknesses in meeting the differing needs of individual pupils. The curriculum is heavily weighted on teaching literacy and numeracy in isolation and this does not prepare the pupils sufficiently well for using their skills creatively or for solving everyday problems.

After a thorough overhaul of systems and policies, and participation in some up-to-date training programmes, safeguarding arrangements now meet requirements. Pupils feel safe in school and explain that it has improved since the start of this academic year. However, outdoor supervision at lunchtimes lacks rigour and does not always fully support pupils' welfare. Nevertheless, pupils are particularly pleased that when they report worries or concerns to the acting headteacher he sorts them out immediately. Pupils know their literacy and numeracy targets and are confident that when teachers mark their books the comments made help them to know how to improve their work.

The school is receiving extensive support from the local authority. The statement of action and plan produced by the local authority meet all requirements. Consultants and lead teachers within the local authority are developing and supporting the work of senior staff. The school improvement adviser is working extremely closely with the school and is providing high quality guidance for the acting headteacher. Most notably, she is supporting the development of monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that self-evaluation is based on accurate judgements. The school improvement adviser is fully aware that the senior leaders and governors need to take faster action in rectifying the weaknesses identified during the inspection and she has been actively promoting this over the past few months.

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

Lorna Brackstone  
Her Majesty's Inspector

