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Mrs Sarah Dunn
Heathlands Primary School
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Dear Mrs Dunn

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 30 June 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also extend my thanks to the school improvement partner and the chair of governors for the time they gave during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 October 2009, the school was asked to:

Raise attainment and improve achievement and progress by:

- ensuring consistently good quality teaching and learning and providing more stimulating and interesting activities to engage pupils and develop their independence in learning
- matching learning activities to the individual needs of pupils.

Improve pupils' attendance, so that by 2010 the attendance target is met by:

- raising the awareness of parents and pupils of the importance of good attendance and the impact of this on pupils' educational achievement
- ensuring staff promote the importance of good attendance.

Promote community cohesion by:

- completing an audit and analysing the school's context
- developing a strategy to improve the contribution to the community
- evaluating the impact of the work by the end of July 2010.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. Determined and energetic leadership by the headteacher,

supported well by other staff, is leading to discernible progress in all areas of the school's work.

Attainment remains low but is improving steadily. The school's accurate systems for tracking pupil progress show that attainment in English and mathematics is improving throughout Key Stage 2. Unvalidated raw scores for the Year 6 national curriculum tests indicate that the trend of improvement seen last year has continued. The number of pupils achieving a Level 4 in both English and mathematics has met the school's challenging targets and is moving closer to the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in English has also increased. In Year 2, moderated teacher assessments indicate that attainment in reading and mathematics is now closer to national averages. Writing, although improving, remains weaker.

In lessons, pupils are making faster progress because the quality of teaching is improving steadily and the curriculum is more stimulating. Consequently, pupils display positive attitudes to learning and show an increasing ability to collaborate and work independently. The majority know their targets and are beginning to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils say that lessons are 'fun'. For example, they enjoyed the recent 'Dragon's Den' simulation that was linked to their learning in mathematics. The impact of whole-school approaches can also be seen in the pupils' improving progress. The 'Big Write' is promoting quality and depth in pupils' writing, whilst children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are often heard using their phonic knowledge to improve their spellings. Teachers consistently plan lessons with clear objectives and focused success criteria. These help pupils to evaluate their own progress. The best lessons are more closely matched to the needs of all pupils and include activities that are challenging for all and stretch the most able. However, the school's accurate monitoring and lesson observations undertaken during the inspection show that inconsistencies remain. Higher order questioning is not used consistently to extend pupils' thinking, nor do teachers ensure that pupils are moved quickly onto the more challenging work that has been planned.

The school has met its attendance target for 2010 as a result of a relentless focus on promoting better attendance, alongside tighter systems for following up absences. This represents good progress since the last inspection. There has been regular communication with parents about the importance of good attendance and clear actions when absence rises above threshold levels. Sensible strategies have been put in place to mediate previous patterns of poor attendance, with specific targeting of 'soft' absences such as appointments made during the school day. Good attendance is celebrated and staff enjoy the healthy competition of working with their classes to improve attendance. Pupils have high aspirations and understand the importance of regular attendance in helping them to achieve their goals. The school is rightly determined to improve further and is considering increasing future targets.

The school has conducted an audit of its community context and has formulated a well-focused community cohesion action plan. There was strong involvement from the parent focus group, supported well by pupils and staff. Members of the local community were also consulted throughout the process and this means that the action plan is appropriate and personalised. The school recognises that it must now begin to evaluate the impact of its actions more systematically. To achieve this there need to be more easily measurable success criteria attached to the desired outcomes that have been identified.

The local authority and the School Improvement Partner work in close collaboration with the school and have done so for some time. They know its strengths and the areas that require further improvement. The headteacher and the governing body have confidence in the support that is provided and feel that they can influence its focus so as to achieve maximum effect. Thus, external support has been utilised particularly well to moderate the school's judgments on the quality of teaching and teacher assessment as well as helping senior leaders to plan professional development opportunities for staff.

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

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector