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Mr I Gilmour
Headteacher
Isambard Brunel Junior School
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Dear Mr Gilmour

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 22 September 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the pupils and staff who contributed to the inspection.

There have been a few staff changes since the time of the last inspection. Two members of staff have left the school and one new teacher has been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 November 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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

The senior management team have clear roles and responsibilities and the governing body is better placed to hold the school to account. Although this has led to some improvements in the school's work, such as improving the quality of boys' writing and increasing levels of attendance, the overall rate of progress has been too slow. This is partly due to shortcomings with the school's self-evaluation and subsequent improvement planning, but also because the school has been sidetracked by some staffing issues. Furthermore, it is only in the last 12 months that the school has been able to use reliable data to track and monitor pupils' progress and identify those at risk of underachieving: this is still only being done for English and mathematics.

Insufficient planning for the intended outcomes for learners, together with the delay in using quantified targets, has compromised the school's capacity to drive improvement.

Attainment dipped in 2009, with levels in science remaining significantly below the national average for two years in succession. The school met its targets for English and mathematics in 2010, with more pupils attaining Level 5 in science. However, too few pupils attained this higher level in English. Attainment and progress are too inconsistent throughout the school, with pupils in Years 4 and 5 making insufficient progress overall. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory, and at times good, progress because of well-targeted support and regular monitoring of their progress.

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 6 is a strength in the school. Pupils in all three classes receive the same high quality curriculum provision, but this level of equity is not reflected in all year groups. The good teaching in Year 6 is characterised by teachers ensuring that activities build effectively on pupils' previous learning. Pupils are encouraged to use success criteria to focus on what they are expected to learn, and teachers use careful questioning to check pupils' understanding and progress. Weaknesses in teaching in other year groups are characterised by low expectations and a slow pace of learning, with insufficient challenge for the more able pupils. Planning for less successful lessons does not detail how skills will be developed and this highlights that teachers' subject knowledge, including of the level at which pupils should be working, is not secure. Assessment during and after most lessons is still in the early stages of development: it is not used well to help pupils to know how they can improve their work. Some pupils would like to know their targets and the level at which they are working. They say that this would give them something to aim for.

There is a strong sense of collegiality amongst most staff; however, they have yet to work effectively to help the school to improve. Leaders and managers are not all sufficiently focused on key areas for improvement. There is still a lack of rigour in the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Although the school reviews and reports on aspects of its work, for instance through work scrutinies, there is little or no reference to the progress made by different groups of pupils or standards. The intended outcomes for different groups of pupils are not clearly identified in action and improvement plans. Recent improvements such as systems to help monitor performance have yet to be fully understood and consistently applied to effect sufficient improvement in achievement and standards.

The school continues to value the support provided by the School Improvement Partner, who has been instrumental in identifying progress and areas for improvement. There is now a greater sense of urgency required to encourage the school to improve on its shortcomings.

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

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2008

- Accelerate progress and raise standards in English, mathematics and science. In particular, improve the quality of boys' writing, the numbers of pupils attaining the higher levels in science and the percentage of pupils making the expected progress in mathematics.
- Improve the consistency of teaching so that it is at least good throughout the school.
- Develop systems to monitor overall performance that are rigorous, widely understood and applied consistently, to effect an improvement in achievement and standards.