

11 December 2007

Mr A Williams
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Dear Mr Williams

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 December, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would like also to thank the pupils I met for being so very courteous and helpful.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in July 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 2 and in mathematics at the end of Year 6
- implement assessment systems
- make sure that all more able learners make sufficient progress.

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 pupils' achievement. In addition, the quality of leadership and management has deteriorated and the progress of pupils with learning difficulties has declined.

In 2007, the value the school added for pupils in Year 6 was in the lowest 5% of the country and targets were not met. The standards reached by these pupils were significantly below the national average in mathematics and science. In English they were below average. This group of pupils started Year 3 with average standards. Hence their progress through Key Stage 2 was inadequate. For pupils in the present Year 6 standards are slightly higher than in 2007 and targets have been raised.

In 2007 at Key Stage 1, standards were average. They declined in all tested subjects from the previous year. In writing, they were significantly below average. The school's

data show that standards are set to decline slightly for the present Year 2. The school has been slow to tackle the areas for improvement from the last inspection and as a result, there are large groups of pupils who are underachieving across the school.

To raise standards in reading and better link reading and spelling, the school has successfully introduced a new programme of teaching letter sounds in the Reception class. This is improving children's learning and is being extended to Years 1 to 3. Attractive areas for pupils to enjoy books have been set up in each class to encourage the enjoyment of reading. The book stock is adequate at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2 the school judges its stock to be unsatisfactory but improving. The school has a deficit budget and supplements the purchase of books through fund-raising. Extra teaching in reading at Key Stages 1 and 2 has yet to show dividends in raising standards.

Last year the school focused on improving pupils' speaking through drama and enhanced opportunities for discussion with partners. This has not been built upon to improve the content of writing. The school is trialling different ways of helping pupils write for a range of purposes but it has yet to consistently use agreed methods to ensure progression in basic skills and more quickly help pupils attain their best.

In mathematics, at Key Stage 2 in particular, the school has only very recently begun to ensure that activities are pitched at the right level to match the needs of different pupils. The pupils enjoy practical work and mathematical challenges but are often let down by their computation skills.

The school's results in the national tests in 2007 were worse than in 2006. This means that standards and achievement have declined since the 2006 inspection. In 2007, far too few pupils attained highly in any subject or at either key stage. In mathematics and science the proportion of pupils who attained highly at Year 6 was significantly below average as was the proportion of pupils in Year 2 who attained highly in writing and reading. Pupils are grouped by ability for English and mathematics, but the planning within each group and the consequent learning does not always meet pupils' individual needs. As a result, higher attainers often mark time and some lower attainers, including pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have unfinished work in their books.

The quality of teaching and consequent learning is very variable. Strengths include the management of pupils' behaviour, the good use of time and the clear use of objectives for learning in each lesson. Presentations by adults are clear. Where teaching is not as strong the lessons are not planned well enough to meet pupils' individual needs and as a result, the more able are often given work that is too easy. Individual education plans for pupils are of variable quality and are not clearly reflected in lesson planning. Questioning includes too few pupils and time is not used well for focused teaching groups or to properly conclude lessons.

A start has been made to build on the basic systems for assessment. With the support of the local authority, these are enabling senior staff to gain a picture of what achievement looks like across the school and where extra resources need to be deployed to raise standards. The analysis of data, however, is over-reliant on the one senior member of staff. Teaching staff do not make the best use of emerging

information to hasten pupils' progress more rapidly. Neither are the school's leaders holding staff sufficiently to account for the progress of pupils in each class.

Last year the school had to lose three staff at the end of the year because of falling rolls and a deficit budget. This took its toll on the school and the focus on raising standards was weakened.

There has been a serious decline in the quality of leadership and management since the last inspection. Performance management has been allowed to drift and is not up-to-date. Monitoring is worse than at the time of the last inspection. Leaders do not do enough to ensure teaching is as good as it should be. Insufficient checks on the quality of teaching results in pupils' learning and the progress they make being more variable than it was in July 2006.

An extended senior leadership team has been established this term. It is at a very early stage of its work. Roles and responsibilities are clear and there is a joint spirit of wanting improvement. Senior leaders appreciate there is much to be done and have spent time training and planning for the future but much is in its infancy and it is too soon to see the outcomes of this early work in improved standards.

The school improvement plan identifies current priorities but pays too little attention to the use of quantifiable data to judge success. Responsibilities and accountability are imprecise. As a result, the way forward lacks clarity and urgency. The governing body lacks its full complement: support and challenge is not as strong as it was in July 2006.

The local authority has given satisfactory support. It has made the school's position clear and is working with senior leaders to hasten progress.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Linda Murphy
Additional inspector