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17 December 2009

Mr Neil Carpenter
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Dear Mr Carpenter

Ofsted Monitoring of Grade 3 Schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 December 2009 and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the staff, pupils, governors and the local authority adviser for finding the time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection there have been several changes to staffing. Four new teachers have joined the school and two assistant headteachers have been appointed. The headteacher is to leave the school at the end of this term. A new headteacher will start in January 2010. The deputy headteacher will be leaving at the end of the spring term. The Chair of the Governing Body is working well to recruit new, suitably experienced governors so as to strengthen governance and provide an increased level of support and challenge to the school.

As a result of the inspection on 25–26 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in English and mathematics by ensuring the curriculum fully meets the needs of all pupils, particularly in reading
- ensure that there is greater consistency in teaching and learning by ensuring that expectations of pupils are always high and that learning activities better match pupils' abilities
- ensure that all leaders and managers are fully accountable for pupils' standards and progress, particularly for boys'.

Having considered all of the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for improvement.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 in 2009, as in 2008, were below average, but closer to age-related expectations than had been the case in previous years. Work seen in lessons and in pupils' books suggests that standards in the lower school are slowly improving.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2009 remained stubbornly low. However, in English, which had been the school's main focus for improvement in 2008/9, progress rates for most pupils leaving Year 6 were at least good. Efforts aimed at improving progress in mathematics in Year 6 enabled some average and potentially higher attaining pupils to make accelerated progress. However, some of the other pupils left the school having made too little progress in mathematics. At both key stages, the gap between boys' and girls' attainments in the national tests and assessments was similar to that nationally, indicating that the gap between boys' and girls' attainment is closing.

The school has been effective in raising the profile of English and capturing pupils' and especially boys' interests. This has been achieved through for example improved resources, better choice of texts and the use of visiting authors, poets and storytellers. The teaching of reading and phonics has also been strengthened and the school has increased the number and range of interventions aimed at helping pupils to catch up. Additional class time is being devoted to teaching reading, reading stories to pupils, and pupils reading for themselves. Although this may have contributed to encouraging pupils' enjoyment of reading, it also means that too little time is now being given to some of the other subjects, including science, in which standards reached by the end of Year 6 are far too low.

In Years 3 to 6, standards in writing, handwriting and presentation remain low. This occurs at least in part because teachers do not systematically teach handwriting skills, and too readily accept untidy work. Not all teachers provide sufficient guidance or challenge to pupils about how they can improve their written work. Some teachers' own handwriting is also poor, which does not set a good example. Some average and potentially higher attaining pupils write at length and clearly have good ideas for writing, but they need further guidance on how to improve and refine their work.

The school has begun to improve mathematics provision so as to raise standards and there are early signs that this is helping to increase pupils' confidence. Teachers are rightly focusing on strengthening pupils' skills in mental calculations and providing more practical activities and resources.

The school has benefited from the support from local authority consultants to help improve teaching. More recently, the assistant headteachers are playing a part in this process through coaching, supporting teachers with planning and modelling lessons. This is helping to bring consistency in some areas. The school's evidence and that gained during this inspection shows some good features in teaching. For example, lessons have a clear purpose, learning intentions are routinely shared with pupils and teachers' classroom organisation and behaviour management skills are effective. Steady progress has been made in addressing some, if not all, of the



specific weaknesses in teaching identified in the last report. Teachers are making better use of assessment to set targets for pupils, pitch lessons at the right level and provide appropriate tasks for pupils of different abilities. As yet, not enough has been done to ensure that marking is regular and to ensure that teachers have sufficiently high expectations of pupils' finished work. Monitoring of lessons and the work in pupils' books is neither regular nor rigorous enough to ensure that agreed policies are implemented consistently, that weaknesses are addressed promptly and that all teachers fully recognise that the key to pupils reaching higher standards is largely dependent on the quality of their teaching.

Pupil progress data is now shared more widely with staff. Senior leaders meet with class teachers regularly to review pupils' progress and discuss how that might be improved; a process that they feel is having a good impact.

Some middle leaders have attended external training to improve their skills and to help strengthen the school's overall leadership capacity. This term, along with the newly appointed assistant headteachers, middle leaders have received training from a local authority consultant. They say this is really helping them to 'develop teamwork' and to 'understand the difference between being a manager and being a leader'. The sessions on how to interpret the school's data were felt to be beneficial in highlighting just how much pupils' performance in the school lags behind that of pupils nationally. This has helped them to recognise the need for urgent improvements. New leaders are only just beginning to play a part in monitoring teaching, learning and pupils' work. This makes it difficult for them to be clear about what precisely they and class teachers need to do to bring about the necessary improvements.

As was the case at the time of the previous inspection, pupils' attitudes to school and learning are good. Pupils are polite, friendly and keen to learn. They behave well and work well together.

The local authority is providing a good deal of support and challenge to the school. It plans to continue its support until the quality of teaching is better and the school's internal capacity to make improvements is stronger.

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

Kathryn Taylor
Additional inspector

