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Mrs J Copeland
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Copeland

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 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to pupils and staff who gave their time to the discussions.

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. A new chair of governors has been in post since September 2009. Eight support staff were made redundant at the end of the summer term 2009 as the school took action to reduce its sizeable budget deficit. An experienced teacher and music specialist has joined the teaching staff.

As a result of the inspection on 10 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that, in lessons, work is well matched to the assessed needs of all pupils, so that they are better challenged and make faster progress
- ensure that the hard work and endeavour of staff is more coherently managed to make school improvement faster
- ensure the whole-school curriculum planning and delivery help raise standards by identifying and assuring a clearer progression of skills and knowledge over time
- provide a key worker for each child in Reception.

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

Unvalidated assessment data for the end of Key Stage 2 tests show that standards in 2009 were broadly average overall. The school has continued to be successful in helping pupils achieve expected standards, but has been less successful in enabling



the most able to reach the highest National Curriculum levels. However, results in 2009 represented good progress for the Year 6 pupils, given their below average starting points. Older pupils currently in Key Stage 2 are making good progress. School monitoring, based on much more rigorous and accurate assessment than before, indicates that far more pupils are set to achieve the highest National Curriculum levels than before.

Attainment at Key Stage 1 has fluctuated in recent years and in 2009 was exceptionally low. The school judges that this was due to the turbulence in staffing this group experienced in Years 1 and 2 and some inadequate teaching. School leaders are now taking urgent action to accelerate the progress of these pupils to help them catch up. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are now making much faster progress than before because the school has placed more emphasis on providing activities which develop children's skills in communication, language and literacy. Standards, though still low, are rising quickly to be more closely aligned to those seen nationally. Younger pupils are now benefiting from improved transition arrangements from the Early Years Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1.

Staff have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning and are more effective in using assessment to inform learning than before. Good support from the local authority has strengthened teachers' confidence in planning learning activities which stretch the most able. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 reported that they have noticed that work has become more challenging. Much sharper assessment procedures ensure that staff now have a much clearer understanding of what pupils are expected to achieve, how well they are doing and how they can improve. All pupils know their learning targets and when marking is at its most effective, they can clearly articulate what they need to do to meet them.

In the most effective lessons, pupils are fully engaged in their work because good teaching ensures that the lesson inspires them to achieve their best. In one Year 6 lesson, pupils demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's Macbeth. The most able pupils were able to articulate complex ideas regarding motivation and guilt and all pupils were able to engage in meaningful discussions about the changing character of Macbeth. In a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils achieved well because the lesson was built on their prior attainment. Pupils' understanding was deepened through opportunities to suggest hypotheses to mathematical problems and discuss ideas with their learning partners. Not all staff are equally effective in devising activities which are well matched to pupils' needs. In these lessons, pupils become disengaged and their behaviour deteriorates.

Pupils report that they enjoy coming to school and for the majority of the time, they behave well. They value opportunities to take responsibility, for example as playground buddies and school councillors. They also appreciate the school's improved provision to keep them safe at playtime, through better supervision and improved security. Pupils report that there is very little bullying but feel very confident that they can approach their teachers or playground buddies if they need



help. All pupils in Reception now have a key worker. Pupils are particularly appreciative of the extra support they receive if they need help with their behaviour or additional emotional support. Consequently, there are striking examples of the school's success in improving outcomes for pupils who have previously exhibited challenging behaviour. Pupils are very pleased about the school's improved provision for extra-curricular music. On the day of the inspection, some pupils were performing in a concert at the Globe Theatre and the school's Gospel Choir will perform at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2010.

Significant improvements to the curriculum have been made since the last inspection. Planning for progression is now much more rigorous, particularly in reading, but has also been strengthened in writing, mathematics and in the foundation subjects. A creative curriculum has been introduced to help ensure that lessons are more challenging and learning activities more varied. The development of skills and knowledge over time is clearly articulated in the schemes of work which support the new curriculum.

The new headteacher has quickly won the support and confidence of staff, pupils and parents. With the support of colleagues, she has accurately identified and begun to address the school's most pressing areas for improvement. Leadership has been strengthened through the formation of a senior leadership team. Lessons are regularly monitored, and school leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. While the pace of school improvement has quickened since the last inspection, strategies are not yet fully in place to ensure that the work of subject coordinators is managed with optimal coherence. This, in part, is because the school does not yet have a single whole-school improvement plan on which to focus the work of all staff. The school receives good support and increased challenge from the governing body. Governors have played a key role in reducing the school's budget deficit which is scheduled to be eliminated in 2011.

Extensive support from the local authority has played an important role in helping the school address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Although the impact of this support can already be seen in improved provision, it is as yet too early for its impact to be fully realised in terms of outcomes for pupils.

Improvements since the last inspection, significantly improved leadership and well-devised strategies to improve provision and outcomes for pupils demonstrate clearly the school's increased capacity to improve.

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
Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector

