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12 May 2011

Mr P J Kelly
Headteacher
Oxford Grove Primary School
Shepherd Cross Street
Halliwell
Bolton
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Dear Mr Kelly,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Oxford Grove Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to the governing body and the local authority for assistance with this visit.

As a result of the inspection on 13 Jan 2010, 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 good progress in making improvements and in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the inspection in January, senior leaders have generated a strong momentum for improving the school and have worked effectively in tackling the issues for improvement. In doing so, their efforts have been clearly focused on raising achievement and in improving the quality of pupils' learning. Staff are stepping up to the mark, working effectively as a team and are taking greater collective responsibility for improving the school. Morale is good, expectations have been raised. As a consequence, underachievement is being targeted more effectively and significant steps have been taken to prioritise actions and accelerate pupils' progress.

Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning, are keen to succeed and always try their best. They have recognised that more of their work is interesting and challenging. They particularly enjoy activities where they can discuss and share their ideas with others and where they can use and apply their knowledge in practical situations. When asked to express their views they found it very difficult to think of any improvements they would like to see. Increasingly they comment that, 'lessons are fun', 'teachers explain things really

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well', 'we get to do more interesting things now', although one or two reported that on occasions some of their work was still 'too easy or sometimes too hard'.

Pupils' current work, as well as the school's own data, shows that increasing numbers of pupils are making better progress than previously in English and mathematics: attainment is beginning to rise. Provisional indications from the national tests for 2011 point to increases in the number of pupils reaching the levels expected of them. For example in Year 6, 100% of pupils in English and 96% in mathematics are on course to have achieved the required levels of progress expected of their age. Elsewhere, increasing numbers of pupils from all age groups are on track to meet their individual targets set by school, although senior leaders are well aware that further work is required to accelerate the progress of Year 4 pupils, particularly in mathematics.

This rising trend has come about because the school has successfully introduced several new initiatives to raise pupils' achievement, which are in turn leading to improvements in classroom practice. Pupils are making better progress in writing because of a whole-school focus on extending their vocabulary and providing further opportunities for them to write in different areas across the curriculum. Staff are increasingly confident in extending pupils' language and thinking skills as they work alongside during independent activities. Pupils' progress in mathematics is also improving because of increased opportunities for them to use and apply their knowledge in practical and problem solving activities. Tracking systems are more effective in identifying pupils who are falling behind. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make, alongside regular reviews to determine how well they are achieving. Staff are held to account for the progress their pupils make and are acting more decisively in their analysis of data. Although not yet consistent in all classes, teachers are increasingly confident in judging the level of pupils' work and have a much improved understanding of using assessments to judge what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that the level of challenge in some classes is sometimes variable, which means that on occasions some pupils, particularly those of a higher ability, do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should.

Another factor contributing to rising levels of attainment is that improvements to teaching and learning are increasing the progress pupils make in lessons. The planning of pupils' work is more focused on outcomes and targets and on activities for different abilities. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to work independently and become more engaged in their learning. Where teaching is strong, teachers challenge pupils well and have the confidence to stand back and let pupils make learning their own. For example, pupils in Year 5 made good progress in their understanding of how to use rhetorical questions in drafting a persuasive argument by assessing and checking each others' work against key criteria. Much of this improvement is down to the way that the school checks on the quality of teaching and improvements to the marking of pupils' work. Comments to pupils by teachers are increasingly developmental and help pupils to understand how to improve their work and reach the next level.

Significant efforts have been made to develop the capacity of middle leaders. This has included a restructuring of roles and responsibilities. As a group they are increasingly involved in scrutinising pupils' work and in observing lessons. This has greatly increased their understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvements can be made and has helped them to become more influential in their work with colleagues.

The governing body too has improved its effectiveness and is far more focused in its work. Through training and support it has increased its knowledge and understanding of the school and has worked effectively in checking on pupils' work and in observing lessons. The formation of a Standards Committee had enabled members of the governing body to be well informed about the school's performance. As a result, they are far more confident to act where necessary to support improvements or to question proposals. As one member commented, 'I now feel far more aware by finding out for myself rather than being told by somebody else'.

Considering the good advances made since its last inspection and along with its other strengths, including accurate self-evaluation and the strong focus on raising achievement, the school has a much improved capacity for sustained improvement.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Steve Isherwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place 13 Jan 2010:

- Raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics by:
 - extending pupils' vocabulary to enrich their creative writing and providing more opportunities to write purposefully across the curriculum
 - improving pupils' ability in applying their mathematical calculation skills in new situations to solve real life number problems.
- Iron out inconsistencies in teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring teachers always use assessment information effectively to set challenging work that matches the abilities of different groups of pupils
 - raising teachers' expectations so that all are fully aware of what pupils can achieve
 - making sure teachers are fully accountable for the progress their pupils make.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - improving the skills of middle managers in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning and taking action to bring about improvement
 - developing the expertise of governors in holding the school to account for its performance.