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14 December 2011

Mrs J Di-Bella
Headteacher
Birchwood Avenue Primary School
Birchwood Avenue
Hatfield
AL10 0PS

Dear Mrs Di-Bella

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Birchwood Avenue Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 December 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils who contributed to the inspection. I note that a permanent headteacher was appointed at the beginning of 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 30 June 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 good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Analysis of data from the 2010/11 national tests, pupils' work at the end of Key Stage 2 and teacher assessments confirms an improving trend in achievement. Standards in writing are improving as a result of better teaching and good levels of challenge for more-able pupils in Key Stage 2. Older pupils are increasingly more adventurous in the choice of vocabulary in their writing because of the more stimulating curriculum. Sentences written in a literacy lesson, such as, 'Alice stared in amazement, she could see a garden of plants watching her like a camera,' stem from a classic novel by Lewis Carroll being used effectively to extend the writing of Year 6 pupils within the context of a history topic on the Victorians. Some inaccuracies in spelling and punctuation still remain due to weaker teaching in the past. However, some detailed marking and effective use of peer assessment are leading to greater levels of accuracy and the eradication of previous underachievement in literacy.

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Pupils' attitudes towards learning across the school are good and often better. Relationships between adults and pupils, and among pupils themselves, are very positive and behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils are keen to undertake project work and model-making at home because the half-termly topics stimulate their interest and actively engage them in extra learning. A drive by the new headteacher and staff to promote good attendance and tackle unauthorised absence is proving successful. Combined with the development of a more stimulating curriculum, this has led to attendance improving to broadly average levels.

Teaching is more consistent in quality and the vast majority is good or better as a result of robust monitoring by the headteacher. The pupils' learning is consistently good in all classes across Key Stage 2 with some outstanding practice now emerging. This is especially the case in literacy, where these pupils work with enthusiasm to complete the tasks set for them. Provision is also good in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of changes to staffing and reorganisation of the teaching areas for this age group. The teaching of the sounds that letters make and early reading skills in both Reception and Year 1 is good. This effective teaching is characterised by detailed lesson planning that fully caters for the needs of all abilities within each class, with good levels of challenge for the more-able learners. Furthermore, in these lessons teachers make very good use of resources to support their teaching and engage learners actively in group work or partner activity. This good teaching is leading to good achievement in Key Stage 2. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 1. However, mundane teaching in Year 2 is leading to slower progress. This is because resources are not used as effectively to support key teaching points and pupils sit for too long on the carpet, listening to the teacher talking or being asked questions.

The headteacher is driving forward improvements in provision. The regular monitoring of teaching and learning is leading to greater levels of consistency and improving outcomes for learners across the school. The effective delegation of responsibilities to other senior members of staff has led to a more integrated curriculum and better outcomes for learners. Self-evaluation is accurate and used well to inform school improvement planning. The members of the governing body are able to ask challenging questions of school leaders because they play a greater role in monitoring the school's work. The local authority has been both supportive and effective in working with the headteacher and staff to raise standards, develop the skills of teachers and improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2010

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010

- Develop the leadership and management skills of the new leadership team.
- Raise levels of achievement, particularly for the more able, by ensuring that teaching includes challenging tasks pitched at the right level.
- Strengthen the role of the governing body by ensuring that members monitor and evaluate the work of the school more closely.