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9 July 2008

Mrs Lynne Pugh
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pugh

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 July, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the staff for their help in gathering the evidence required and to both Dennis Stott, your Chair of Governors, and to Jean Wilkins, your School Improvement Partner, for the time they gave to discuss the school's work.

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 on 11 and 12 June 2007 the school was asked to:

- ensure that teaching and the curriculum support children in making a strong start in reading and writing in the Nursery and Reception Year
- increase the opportunities for writing in Years 1 and 2 and ensure that they are always well matched to all pupils' needs to raise standards in this area
- make sure that accurate assessments are made of children's attainment and progress in the Nursery and Reception Year
- more rigorously evaluate the impact of teaching and the curriculum on the outcomes for pupils.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress overall in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Each area for improvement is addressed in detail below.

Ensure that teaching and the curriculum support children in making a strong start in reading and writing in the Nursery and Reception Year.

The school has taken prompt action in remedying the concerns about provision in the Foundation Stage and good progress has been made in addressing this key issue. The curriculum has been developed to include effective planning on how children's early reading and writing skills are to be successfully promoted, which has enabled children to make good progress. The previous inadequate achievement in reading and writing has been eradicated and children achieve well across all aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum. There is now a strong focus in both the Nursery and in Reception classes on developing children's interest in books and in reading, and enthusiasm for writing. In the Nursery this was well illustrated by the many children eager to make their own invitation for teddy to come to a party. In the Reception classrooms there are many examples of children's writing that have originated in adult led activities and children's own self initiated tasks. Children's captions and labels are proudly displayed against examples of their work and as part of a large display showing the many attractions at Woburn Abbey Safari Park which the children visited recently.

To support the development of children's language skills, the school requested the support of the local authority in providing staff with training on the 'Letters and Sounds' programme. This has led to regular teaching sessions each week and the systematic teaching has had a very positive impact on the development of children's language skills. The children are enthusiastic about their ability to sound out words in reading and in writing and are developing a real confidence in their own abilities. Standards in reading and writing are still slightly weaker than other aspects of learning. Boys are not yet reaching the same standards as the girls but their achievement is also good. Children are now reaching the standards expected for their age and range of abilities.

Increase the opportunities for writing in Years 1 and 2 and ensure that they are always well matched to all pupils' needs to raise standards in this area.

The school has made satisfactory progress towards addressing this area for improvement. Appropriate changes have been made to the curriculum to enable teachers to make positive links between subjects and to plan opportunities for writing that are interesting and purposeful. In Year 2, for example, pupils were developing the skills of using persuasive language in an activity linked to their learning about the environment in science and in geography. Other writing opportunities have been made in history topics and in developing pupils' computer skills. This greater range of opportunities to write has been planned alongside the additional sessions on learning about 'Letters and Sounds' which have also promoted pupils' better reading, spelling and, therefore, writing. Teachers' expectations for pupils' standards and progress have risen as more effective systems for monitoring pupils' work have been implemented. Teachers are more successful at planning activities that build on what pupils already know and can do. Lessons are usually planned with elements of challenge and a variety of strategies are employed to support pupils' writing skills so pupils of differing abilities succeed in their task.

Standards in the most recent national tests are higher than in the previous year and are broadly average in writing. Boys' standards still lag behind those of the girls however. Their lesser achievement in writing has been recognised by the school. Additional reading resources have been bought that will be of greater interest to boys and writing tasks are chosen with boys' interest in mind so that the boys are better motivated to write. These strategies are having a positive impact and boys' standards are improving, but not as successfully as that of the girls'. More able pupils do not achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and this continues to be a focus for the school. The increasing numbers of pupils who are in the early stages of learning English are well supported and make satisfactory progress overall. The curriculum is being adapted satisfactorily so that pupils gain a structured programme of English language from specially trained teaching assistants. It is recognised, however, that more can be done to support these pupils' learning, such as planning additional sessions which introduce pupils to vocabulary they will meet in their next topics on subjects such as science and history.

Make sure that accurate assessments are made of children's attainment and progress in the Nursery and Reception Year.

The school has benefited from the good support of the local authority in developing teachers' skills of assessing children's skills and knowledge and in developing systems that will monitor their progress across the Foundation Stage. Teachers' assessments are now more accurate and the end of year judgements on their success in reaching the early learning goals have been moderated by the local authority advisers and agreed as correct. Regular observations are made on children's work and on their advancements in skills and knowledge. This is recorded effectively and builds into an overview of children's learning during the Nursery and Reception classes. Writing books have been introduced into the Reception classes and each month children's writing is used to assess how well the children are progressing. These examples build into a very clear picture of children's progress which are shared with parents. Teachers use these examples of writing to set targets for each child's next steps so that their writing skills continue to improve at a steady pace. Data from teachers' regular assessments are used each term to produce comprehensive information on standards and achievement. This is giving the school an accurate view of the improvements being made, especially in developing children's reading and writing skills. It is not yet analysed as thoroughly as it could be to support teachers' evaluation of strengths and weakness in teaching. Overall, however, the school has made good progress towards addressing this key issue for improvement.

More rigorously evaluate the impact of teaching and the curriculum on the outcomes for pupils.

The school has made satisfactory progress towards addressing this area for improvement. A satisfactory range of procedures are used to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. Subject managers monitor teachers' planning and review pupils' work. Senior leaders are increasingly involved in observing teachers' lessons and this is used to monitor not only the quality of teaching but also focus on those aspects of development recently introduced across

the school. A focus of observations in English, for example, has been the effectiveness of guided writing sessions on helping pupils to improve. As yet, opportunities have not been introduced for discussing with pupils aspects of their learning. This limits the school's evaluation of teaching and the curriculum.

Data from teachers' assessments is checked regularly so that those pupils who are likely to underachieve are identified and additional support is provided. Teachers are now more involved in this process and additional tracking systems have been introduced to give them a clear view of those pupils working at expected levels and those who are not. This is raising teachers' awareness and expectations. As a consequence, progress is improving. These strategies are enabling the school to evaluate satisfactorily the impact of teaching and the curriculum on pupils' learning.

Some managers are still developing their monitoring skills. Opportunities to share observations of teaching are proving a positive strategy to stimulate discussion about what constitutes good teaching and learning and to share good practice. Many new initiatives have been introduced over the last year. These are due to be evaluated now as end of year tests provide the data by which their impact can be assessed. This process is planned for the end of the term and although the headteacher and senior staff have an overview of the progress being made it is not yet as detailed as it could be. Several members of staff are leaving at the end of the term and others will be joining the senior leadership team. This additional expertise is being welcomed in school, as it is seen as providing even more opportunities to move forward. However, the new staff will need time to settle in and adjust before the school is able to effectively evaluate its work.

Governors are well informed and involved in the process of school evaluation and show a strong commitment to improvement. The headteacher, senior staff and governors recognise that recent improvements have ensured inadequate provision has been eliminated and that they now need to build on this satisfactory base to achieve good standards of education throughout the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Hazel Callaghan
Additional Inspector