

25 June 2008

The Headteacher
Hazelmere Junior School
Hawthorn Avenue
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Essex
CO4 3JP

Dear Mrs Firth

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 24 June 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff and governors who contributed to the inspection and to the local authority adviser who met with me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 28-29 November 2007, the school was asked to:

1. raise standards particularly in English and mathematics, so that all pupils achieve to their full potential in tests and lessons
2. improve the planning and teaching of lessons so that they focus on the individual learning needs of all pupils
3. ensure that leadership and management at all levels, including governors, play an effective role in managing, monitoring, evaluating and challenging the school's work.

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

Over the last few years, standards among pupils joining Hazelmere Junior School have been below average. This is partly explained by the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils have usually progressed at an average rate compared to children with similar backgrounds in other schools. In national tests at age 11, standards have usually been broadly average in English and science and well below average in mathematics. When the three subjects are combined, the overall standards are below average. The 2007 results were unusual in that English results were also below average.

The school has introduced a number of changes to teaching and learning. With the support of the local authority, it has mapped out for each pupil some key learning

points that will help them reach the standards expected for their age, taking into account their previous records and any learning difficulties. Lessons are now planned with three or more different levels of work, making it easier to cater for pupils' individual needs. A new tracking system is used to monitor each pupil's progress towards their targets. As a result, some pupils are being given extra support to help them reach their targets.

Teachers have had training from an external consultant designed to improve the quality of teaching in the short term and to give teachers the skills to continue to improve under their own efforts. Teaching assistants have been given clearer guidance and greater responsibility for helping pupils to learn. As headteacher, you now have the mentor that all new heads are entitled to. Together with the local authority, you are providing training for the governing body to improve their effectiveness.

This renewed focus on assessment and planning has been complemented by regular monitoring by senior leaders, local authority advisers and the governing body. This has included lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and checks on planning and marking. One teacher has left the school and two classes currently have temporary teachers. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed for September to strengthen both teaching and management.

The impact of these changes is clearly apparent. There is now clear evidence that the senior staff and governors are monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The most promising sign is that the school is beginning to take the initiative on improvements. It is working in partnership with the local authority so there is a balance between the improvements instigated by the local authority and those that the school has identified for itself. The local authority's statement of action, setting out how it will support the school has been revised and is now satisfactory. The support has been effective and well received by the school.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Lesson observation records show that the school is meeting its target of 60% of lessons being good or better by this point in the year. Of the four lessons observed in the inspection, three were good or better and none were inadequate. Pupils' progress matched the quality of the teaching. In an outstanding literacy lesson, pupils were captivated when the teacher took on the role of the 'old man' from the film they had watched, and answered their questions to him 'in character'. This insight into the complexity of his feelings helped them to enrich their own writing later in the lesson.

The changes to assessment mean that teachers are now more focused on what pupils are learning. Teachers are getting better at asking questions that explore pupils' understanding. A simple, but effective approach to assessment in foundation subjects is now well established. Pupils say that marking helps them to know how to improve their work. However, they do not all know and understand their targets, partly because teachers are not yet consistent in the way they refer to them.

Although pupils are now being assessed against clear criteria, some previous assessments are now thought to be inaccurate and it will be some time before they

work their way out of the system. At the time of this monitoring visit, the opportunity to compare the new assessment system with the previous test-based approach was still a week in the future, so the school was unable to provide conclusive evidence that standards or achievement had improved.

You have given strong leadership since the last inspection. The assistant headteachers have supported you by taking on additional responsibilities and the enlarged governing body is providing appropriate challenge. However, further work is needed in two important areas: to be ready for re-inspection, the school needs to give further attention to its data management and its self-evaluation form (SEF). The school holds pupil progress data in a form not amenable to analysis. Although it has records on every pupil, it is not easy to calculate summary statistics such as average attainment or average progress. This contributes to the second issue: accurate and comprehensive data plays an important role in self-evaluation. The school's current SEF does not always reflect the leaders' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The document could be improved by including more evaluative comment, based on analysis of pertinent data. It would also be helpful to check that the SEF answers the questions included as prompts in the template

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector