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Mrs Wendy Gibbins  
The Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Gibbins

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you gave me when I inspected your school on 11 February 2009, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you also thank the staff and pupils who met with me as well as the vice-chair of governors?

The number of pupils on roll has risen since the last inspection but remains some way below capacity. The local authority has returned control of the budget to the governing body. Three new staff joined the school at the start of this academic year, replacing three who had left. One of the new appointments was the role of assistant headteacher, replacing a temporary postholder.

The inspection of 2 and 3 July 2008 asked the school to: raise standards in English, mathematics, science and particularly in pupils' speaking, listening, writing and presentation; to ensure teaching is consistently good and that tasks match pupils' varying needs; and, to ensure subject coordinators make a greater impact on raising standards.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress.

The last inspection report described a legacy of lost learning which the school, under the leadership of the then relatively new headteacher, had begun to tackle. Very low results by Year 6 pupils in assessment tests last summer showed the improvements came too late for some, as well as demonstrating the scale of the task ahead. The evidence of lessons observations, work scrutiny and discussions with pupils from this visit shows they are making better progress toward challenging targets in English, mathematics and science, reflecting steady improvement. Weaknesses in basic



literacy areas remain a key barrier to success but are reducing. Pupils still find it a challenge to discuss and extend ideas but are beginning to do so. They are also beginning to write at greater length and to show understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts. The school's analysis of assessment data shows better progress over time, although there continue to be inconsistencies between subjects and classes. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. The school has successfully placed much emphasis on improving behaviour. The firm reinforcement of expectations and a new reward system have ensured that the conditions are now right for learning. However, the pupils have a legacy of poor skills in organising themselves, collaborating and working in teams so as to take responsibility for their learning.

The school has taken satisfactory steps to consolidate a teaching team which has again seen significant changes in class teachers although much continuity among teaching assistants. Staff training has been a high priority. Teachers are held to account effectively for pupils' progress through monitoring checks carried out by the headteacher or other senior leaders. There are more strengths in teaching than at the time of the last inspection, but there is some way to go to ensure that the majority of pupils' learning experiences are good or better. The staff are now better at planning lessons for pupils of differing abilities. Some parts of lessons, notably group work, contain tasks adapted suitably for different pupils and lessons usually involve a good variety of activities to sustain their focus. However, other opportunities are missed to stretch pupils or challenge them to think for themselves. Introductions to lessons do not always clarify to all pupils what they are doing and why. Whole-class questioning is rightly emphasised as a means to extend speaking and listening skills, but sometimes fails to engage all pupils. Marking is often completed in detail. But, some is inappropriate for the pupils' age or ability or does not ask enough of the pupils in responding to the comments made. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to managing pupils' behaviour, but on occasion lack the subject knowledge to help pupils move their learning forward.

The subject leaders for English, mathematics and science are more effective in raising standards as a result of the support they receive and the guidelines set by the local authority personnel and the headteacher. They are involved in a wider range of monitoring, including checking teachers' planning and scrutinising pupils' work. Their involvement in lesson observation is embryonic, so their understanding of pupils' experiences in every classroom is limited. The subject leaders are beginning to lead development work, although there are inconsistencies between them in the extent of this. They are working to strategic plans with satisfactory long-term targets for pupils' achievement. However, the short term milestones are not clear enough to identify systematically any problems early.

The local authority provides well balanced support and challenge for the school. It recognises the seriousness of the task and the need to build internal capacity for school improvement. Arrangements for monitoring the impact of its support are good.

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

Stephen Long  
Her Majesty's Inspector

