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19th May 2009

Mrs Lawson
Thornhill Lower School
Grove Road
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Dear Mrs Lawson,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on April 29, 2009, 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 members of the governing body who gave up time to meet with me, and to all of the pupils who were so welcoming during my visit.

Since the school's last inspection three new teachers have joined the staff. Following the promotion of the deputy head, the school is currently in the process of recruiting a replacement.

As a result of the inspection on 14-15 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards in English and mathematics, particularly in mathematics in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that all staff with leadership roles contribute effectively to raising standards in their subjects.
- Ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that the school complies fully with current government requirements for safeguarding.

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



Standards and achievement have risen because the strong and focused leadership has resulted in better teaching and learning. Pupils make good progress from low starting points, and standards are broadly in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 1. Standards of reading and writing are slightly below average at this point, while standards in mathematics are in line with the national average. The pupils make further progress during Key Stage 2 and standards are average in mathematics and reading by the end of year 4. When pupils leave the school standards in writing remain slightly below average. The school's data and pupils' work indicates that the recent gains are set to be maintained by the end of the summer term 2009.

A determining factor in raising standards has been the positive impact and effectiveness of the school leaders' work. The headteacher provides clear and determined direction for improvement. She is well supported by a renewed leadership team which places pupil's achievement at the heart of their work. The governing body is well informed and is supportive of the headteacher's high expectations and ambitions for the school. Significant amounts of funding have been allocated to improve the learning environment for the pupils, for example the school has recently increased the number of computers so that each classroom is well equipped to make good use of the available technology. The school has secured the support of the local authority. This has been effective in helping to raise standards in reading and writing. The school effectively assesses and tracks pupils' progress, identifying and intervening where progress falters. These efficient procedures provide class teachers and senior leaders with a clear picture of progress at an individual pupil level. Teaching assistants are well deployed to address the needs of pupils who need the most support. The headteacher has successfully created a learning environment which is bright and welcoming. The school's values are ably reflected in the high quality of displays around the school.

The overall quality of teaching in the school is good, and this is reflected in the progress that pupils make from the time they enter in the nursery until they leave at the end of Year 4. Teachers plan well and provide an appropriate balance between whole-class teaching and independent activities. In the best lessons, teachers make very good use of their own time and are constantly engaged with groups of pupils. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards. The recent investment in information and communication technology is having a positive impact in some lessons, for example when teachers make good use of computers to support learning across the curriculum. However this is not a consistent feature in all classes.

Where teaching is strongest, lessons are lively and well paced. Pupils make good progress in these lessons because their individual needs are catered for, and the work that they do is pitched at an appropriate level for their different abilities. Throughout the school lessons are calm and productive times for learning. Teachers and teaching assistants establish very positive relationships with pupils, enabling mutual trust and an enjoyment of learning to flourish. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their school, praising its teachers and appreciating the clubs and activities that are available before and after school. They enjoy lessons and work hard, displaying

positive attitudes to learning and relishing the challenges that teachers set for them. Pupils' work is well marked, providing useful information for improvement. In some classes, pupils are involved in assessing their own work, and in others, targets are set for pupils to aspire to. However, these features are not consistently reflected in all classes. A significant strength of the teaching in the school is the use of teaching assistants. They lead group work effectively and have a positive impact on both the academic and behavioural standards that pupils attain.

The school currently complies with the government's requirements for the safeguarding of pupils. Rigorous procedures are in place to ensure that all staff are subject to appropriate checks.

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,

Chris Moodie
Additional Inspector