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Mr Micah Cummings  
Headteacher  
Ashton West End Primary School  
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OL7 0BJ

Dear Mr Cummings

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 December 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff and pupils for their courtesy and also to the chair of governors and the School Improvement Partner for meeting with me at such short notice.

Since the previous inspection, there have been no significant changes in staff and numbers of pupils are broadly similar.

As a result of the inspection on 19-20 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in literacy, paying particular attention to the way pupils plan and structure different kinds of writing
- improve pupils' ability to use and apply numbers and calculate accurately to raise standards in mathematics
- develop the leadership skills of those with responsibility for planning and leading subjects across the curriculum.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The key reason for the inadequate judgement is that provisional results in 2009 indicate that given their starting points, pupils in Key Stage 2 made less progress overall than expected for similar pupils and attainment remains low. However, results for this cohort were affected by the arrival of a significant group of pupils who joined the school in the later stages of this key stage. Key Stage 1 assessment results overall show that attainment remains low. However, within these results are some pockets of improvement. There has been a slight rise in the number of pupils gaining the expected and higher levels, in writing at the end of Year 2 and attainment in mathematics has moved from low to below average for these pupils. Pupils in Year 6 reached average levels of attainment in English and progress, for the pupils who started with the school in Year 3, was better than that for similar pupils. In mathematics attainment remained low and in science dropped with pupils making less progress, in both subjects, than would be expected compared to similar pupils in similar schools. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils work show that attainment and achievement are inconsistent throughout the school.

When children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage their skills in communication and language are less than expected for children of this age. At the time of the inspection the school had just implemented a project to improve phonic skills in this stage. As a result children are writing earlier than in the past and are entering Key Stage 1 with a more secure knowledge of letters and sounds. Owing to the success of this programme the leadership team decided to implement the programme throughout the Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes. All pupils are assessed every half term to identify the progress they have made and are organised into groups based on their prior understanding. A discrete session of phonics is now taught at the same time in each class. Recent assessment of pupils' progress shows they are moving through the programme well.

Through support from the local authority staff have gained more confidence in the teaching of English. Consultants have delivered training and modelled lessons. They have also worked with coordinators to analyse test and assessment results to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Lesson planning is based on this information and activities are chosen to support pupils. Pupils spoken to during the visit report that they know their targets for English and have an improved understanding of how to structure and plan their writing. For example, in Year 2, pupils started the English lesson by an active role-play recount of the story of The Tiger Who Came to Tea. To engage pupils the teacher used the interactive whiteboard effectively to show a picture of a tiger in their own classroom and led them through a series of questions to provide a structure for their own writing. Pupils were encouraged to speak and listen by using talking partners. In this way pupils had a clear structure and were able to rehearse their writing within a supportive climate.

At the headteacher's request the local authority has recently provided support for the development of mathematics. To improve attainment in this subject is a priority and a whole school target for mathematics has been set. The numeracy consultant has worked with the coordinators to identify the exact level at which pupils are working and the gaps in their skills. This has also led to an identification of pupils

who need support or challenge and intervention strategies have been implemented. There is a need to further target this support more precisely for the needs of the higher achieving pupils. There is now a weekly lesson on using and applying mathematics for each class. Pupils know their targets and consider that activities in mathematics are more fun. They say that if they do not understand anything the teacher will now 'go through it bit by bit until we do understand'. The school is working hard to use the development of mathematics to further the partnership with parents. At the time of the visit the school held a mathematics workshop which was well attended by parents.

Since the inspection the headteacher has reviewed subject leaders' areas of responsibility. This has led to dual leadership of English and mathematics. The subject leader who implemented the phonics programme has brought that expertise to the coordinator role. A teacher in her second year of teaching has taken on joint responsibility for mathematics. The previous leader for mathematics has relinquished that role to concentrate more fully on classroom practice. Subject leaders have completed some analysis of tests and assessments, completed some scrutiny of pupils' work and planning. There is an opportunity to use this information more sharply to identify what aspects of classroom practice can be improved. Leaders in other subjects have completed action plans and plan to give a verbal or written evaluation of the subject to governors.

School leaders focus on raising achievement and they acknowledge that there is still much to do to improve. Areas for improvement have been identified and action taken to tackle the issues. For example, through observation of teaching across the school, areas for improvement in the delivery of mathematics were identified. Likewise action has been taken to strengthen the profile of teaching and learning across the school. Priorities in the school improvement plan are apt and focus on raising attainment and achievement. However, it lacks sharpness in measurable outcomes for pupil progress and the quality of teaching, and relevant milestones to secure more rapid progress. This restricts its use in evaluating the progress the school is making against targets. There is a wealth of assessment information in the school and the school's tracking system to record pupils' progress has been adapted to reflect the progress pupils make over a term. This will allow leaders and governors to more precisely check whether pupils are making sufficient progress. There is scope to review the amount of assessment information the school holds and the way it records the evaluation of this information to more accurately support the specific progress groups of pupils are making. Governors are supportive of the school and have taken steps to fill vacancies. However, there still remain five vacancies on the governing body which limits the support and challenge the governors can provide for the school.

Since the inspection the local authority has engaged well with the school to provide support and guidance in literacy. That focus has now moved to mathematics. It is working with the school to fill the governor vacancies.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew  
Her Majesty's Inspector