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Mr David Willis
Headteacher
Elm Wood Primary School
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Dear Mr Willis

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 16 June 2010, and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the Year 5 pupils who gave up some time to tell me about the school and the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body for making themselves available at short notice.

Since the previous inspection, the school has had to manage a high proportion of staff absences due to maternity leave as well as changes in the working arrangements for a number of senior staff. Several posts continue to be covered on a temporary basis.

As a result of the inspection on 25–26 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement by the end of Key Stage 2
- improve the consistency of teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6
- make effective use of procedures for checking pupils' progress so that their next steps in learning can be clearly identified.

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

The trend in pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 has been steadily below average. There was a slight improvement in the Year 6 national test results in 2009. The school's data indicate an improved picture for 2010 as the proportion of Year 6 pupils predicted to reach the level expected for their age is broadly average. The school expects to reach its statutory target in English but not in mathematics. Key



Stage 1 national assessments in 2009 indicate that standards, which had been broadly average, fell to slightly below average. Provisional results for 2010 show a similar picture. At both key stages the proportion of pupils reaching levels beyond those expected for their age is below that found nationally. The performance of girls is lower than that of their peers nationally at both key stages. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 improved in 2009 to average in English and mathematics; it remained below average in science. The current Year 6 cohort has made satisfactory progress from its starting point at the beginning of Year 1. The current Year 2 pupils have made good progress during Key Stage 1.

The school's leaders have put a number of strategies in place to raise standards and improve achievement. Having identified a direct correlation between pupils' progress and their rates of attendance, the school has taken a range of successful steps to increase attendance. It has risen markedly this year and currently exceeds the national average.

A major focus has been the introduction of a helpful, clear and accessible system for tracking pupils' progress. Effective use is made of this to identify those pupils who are falling behind, determine the nature of support needed to accelerate their progress and evaluate its impact. A range of interventions, carefully mapped, is employed including one-to-one sessions and booster groups. Teachers are held to account regularly for the progress made by their classes. Leaders have also used the tracking system successfully to identify whole-school issues, such as those linked to the teaching of reading in Key Stage 1 and phonics. New schemes to address these are having a positive impact, notably on the progress of Year 1 pupils in reading. Under the auspices of the local authority, the school is participating in the 'Girls into maths' initiative through which staff are gaining an increased awareness of strategies that raise the confidence and skills of girls.

The introduction of the tracking system has been supported by a drive both to improve the accuracy of assessment of pupils' small steps in learning, and to strengthen the link between assessment and lesson planning to reflect pupils' individual learning needs. Some impact of these initiatives is evident but it has been diluted by the many temporary staffing arrangements. In the lessons observed pupils persevered, enjoying the challenge, where work built appropriately on their previous learning. They used 'working walls' to help them recall key ideas and the direction of the topic. However, in some instances learning was not broken down into suitably small stages for pupils to make steady progress, so the pace of lessons dipped and pupils' interest waned. Insufficient consideration was given to the choice of resources to support learning. Leaders acknowledge that links between assessment and teaching need to be strengthened.

The school has an appropriate marking policy but this is not implemented consistently by all staff. Where it is followed, pupils receive good feedback on their progress and helpful pointers for improvement. In some classes, pupils have time to

respond to teachers' comments, although this good practice is not widespread. Pupils are increasingly involved in evaluating their own work and that of their classmates. Year 5 pupils spoken to value such opportunities and say these have a positive impact on their learning.

The local authority has provided considerable, sustained support through a number of initiatives that are well-matched to the school's stage of development. These are gradually gaining purchase and influencing practice positively.

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

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector