

4 July 2008

Mrs N Shipman
The Executive Headteacher
Fox Hill Primary School
Keats Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S6 1AZ

Dear Mrs Shipman

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when my colleague, David Muir, and I inspected your school on 2 July 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful to the governors, members of staff and pupils who talked to us.

In September 2007 nearly all the school's teaching staff were new and the majority were newly qualified. There have been changes in staffing since the last inspection and more are expected, but in September 2008 the school will have a core group of teachers with shared experience. Staff absence has been much reduced during the year. A group of newly qualified teachers has successfully completed their first year with appropriate support. The executive headteacher has had a strong impact on stabilising the school and establishing clear direction, tackling underperformance and building capacity at all levels. While it is too soon to see the impact on pupils' performance in national tests, there are some early indications of improving standards and progress.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 December 2007, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress, especially across Years 1 and 2, in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the work of the governing body so that it complies with all statutory requirements and holds the school rigorously to account for its performance
- use assessment information more systematically to build on what pupils already know and to pinpoint earlier those who require additional support
- raise attendance.

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.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 have been significantly below average. In 2007, boys' writing lagged far behind girls by the end of Year 2. By the end of Year 6, overall achievement was below average and significantly low in English. The school is working hard to raise standards to match the minimum levels expected nationally in English and mathematics. Inspection evidence, including teachers' assessments, indicates that attainment is improving although standards are still low. Around half the pupils in both key stages had met or exceeded age-related expectations by May this year, with notably higher proportions in Years 1 and 5. Achievement is accelerating, although the pace of improvement varies from class to class. Even where solid progress is being made, it is not always fast enough to make up for past deficits in learning. In Year 6, for example, many pupils have weak writing skills which limit their overall achievement. In Year 5, those weaknesses are much less apparent. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory but not good enough to make up for past underachievement.

There has been considerable progress in teachers' use of assessment data to plan for their pupils' different needs. This is making a major contribution to improving the quality of provision, as well as pupils' enjoyment and achievement. Teachers and support staff have an accurate picture of what their pupils can do and need to learn next, starting from the beginning of the Foundation Stage. Teachers seen during the visit use this to plan lessons which provide the right level of challenge and support, for example, by scaffolding and modelling tasks. Those pupils not making the expected progress are identified early, through regular pupil progress reviews. A wider range of interventions is now in place and their impact is monitored closely. Pupils are increasingly involved in their own assessment: they carry with them bookmarks showing their individual targets, and those we spoke to in Years 5 and 6 could explain how they would try to reach them in that day's work. They appreciated the helpfulness of the regular, constructive marking of their work.

Attendance has improved, compared with last year, for all classes. The trend over time is moving upwards, but attendance is still below the national average and this remains a work in progress. Improvements are due to better coordinated and more proactive efforts by the learning mentor and inclusion manager, who work closely with the local authority and other agencies to change attitudes and overcome individual families' difficulties. As a result, the number of pupils whose attendance causes concern has reduced each term. Pupils spoken to appreciate the way their ideas have been taken into account to make school an enjoyable place to be, with lots of activities in free time and holidays. A high proportion participate in out of school learning.

Urgent steps have been taken to improve the effectiveness of the governing body. New members have been recruited, although there remain vacancies for parents. Participation in meetings has improved since the previous inspection. Two relatively recent members we spoke to had had a helpful induction into their roles but were conscious they needed to understand more. They were looking forward to more

specialised training which would equip them to ask sharper questions. An appropriate committee structure is in action. Missing policies are now in place, and the new Sex and Relationships Education policy is being implemented as intended.

The school has made good use of significant local authority support which began before the last inspection. The learning partnership with another school has been productive in sharing ideas and systems, although there is further scope for teachers from the two schools to learn from each other. Consultants have contributed some valued coaching. An Early Years consultant has effectively plugged the gap in middle leadership in the Foundation Stage which, with Key Stage 1, remains a priority for the school to fill. The local authority has monitored progress carefully and, when necessary, provided robust challenge and a helpful steer.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector