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Mrs Julie Hawkins
The Headteacher
Hardwick Primary School
Ferriston
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 1XE

Dear Mrs Hawkins

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Hardwick Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 May 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff and governors for their help during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 21 and 22 September 2010 the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

There have been no significant contextual changes in the school since the last inspection.

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.

The school has in place a robust and accurate tracking system to monitor and assess pupils' progress. These assessments show that attainment is rising steadily and securely across all year groups. This is an improvement since the last inspection and is beginning to address past underachievement, especially for the more able. However, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 1 are still below the national average because the improvements in the quality of teaching and initiatives to accelerate pupils' progress have not had enough time to fully impact on raising attainment. Across the different year groups, pupils' achievement in mathematics is better than in reading and writing. To address this teachers are developing pupils speaking and vocabulary skills in lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils were successfully extending their vocabulary skills by being taught how to express their feelings through painting. Also, the school has introduced theme days based on

topics such as 'Space' as a focus to develop pupils' writing skills, especially for boys. The school is also working soundly to raise standards in mathematics through taking a consistent approach across the different year groups to develop pupils' mental and calculation skills. These initiatives are beginning to raise standards but have yet to fully impact on pupils' attainment.

While some teaching remains satisfactory, there is an overall improvement in the amount of consistently good teaching. With support from external consultants, teachers have had opportunities to work together and share good practice. This has had a positive impact on improving the planning of lessons so that different groups of pupils are more effectively challenged, especially the more able. As a result, assessments show that more pupils are now working at the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Also, the linking of subjects together to engage pupils' interest and provide more opportunities for questioning and extending pupils' thinking is beginning to develop their independent learning skills. For example, in one lesson, pupils were using design and technology skills to create an island that was linked to their geography topic. However, during the lesson, opportunities were missed by staff to further extend pupils' learning and vocabulary skills through more incisive questioning of pupils about their work.

There has been an improvement in the accuracy of senior leaders' evaluation of teaching and learning. The headteacher and senior leaders have introduced a more rigorous system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, especially through lesson observations. This is another contributory factor in the increase in the amount of consistently good teaching across the school. Also, the headteacher and senior leaders regularly monitor pupils' work and hold staff to account through frequent pupil progress meetings. This is having a positive effect in making staff collectively accountable for pupil achievement across all year groups. As a result, pupils are now beginning to make accelerated progress across the school, but this has not yet had time to impact fully on raising attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The governors are now focusing more clearly on the attainment and progress made by pupils. They have been working with the local authority to re-organise their structure, and new personnel with appropriate expertise have strengthened the governing body. As a result, the governors are now beginning to more effectively hold the school to account for the standards achieved by pupils.

While the school has taken positive steps to improve attendance, these have not been completely effective in raising attendance to the national level. However, due to initiatives, such as awards for good attendance and regular newsletters to parents, attendance rates are beginning to rise. Also, the effective use of the local community worker has had an impact on reducing the number of pupils and children who are persistently absent.

The local authority's statement of action plan has been judged as fit for purpose. The statement of action plan is clearly focused on the school's weaknesses and is helping to increase the rate of improvement. The local authority has provided sound support for the school through the use of literacy and numeracy consultants to work with staff to improve their teaching skills. Also, the School Improvement Partner has supported the headteacher and senior leaders in monitoring pupil progress and in developing senior leaders' lesson observation skills. A review of the effectiveness of the governing body and the establishment of a 'task' group, comprising of local authority personnel and external consultants, have given sound guidance to the governing body. While this support is well targeted, its impact is just beginning to be seen.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Henry
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2010.

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at least to equal national expectations for each year group by December 2011 by:
 - developing pupils' speaking skills and extending their vocabulary
 - ensuring themes for writing motivate boys.
- Improve teaching so that all of it is consistently good by July 2011, by:
 - injecting pace into lessons so that they engage and interest pupils
 - sufficiently challenging all pupils, especially the more able, so that they make good or better progress.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the governing body fully holds the headteacher and other senior leaders and managers to account
 - ensuring self-evaluation of teaching and learning is accurate, based on systematic and rigorous monitoring at all levels.
- Improve attendance, at least to equal national average by December 2011, by:
 - highlighting to parents the importance of good attendance
 - refining systems to promote attendance and reduce absence.