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Mr Stuart Fox
Headteacher
Branksome Heath Middle School
Livingstone Road
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Dear Mr Fox

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Branksome Heath Middle School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to staff and pupils who gave up their time to talk to me.

One senior teacher has become half time and is now working as part of a job sharing arrangement. A newly qualified teacher was appointed in September on a temporary one-year contract. Three governors have been replaced and an additional vice-chair appointed. Extensive renovation work on the school's older building has taken place and improvements to the boundary fence are underway. The school anticipates some fluctuation in numbers as a result of reorganisation within the local authority when they move from a three-tier to a two-tier system in 2013.

As a result of the inspection on 2 and 3 March 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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 school's leaders have made a strong start in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Pupils' attainment, especially in writing, is rising, with more pupils reaching levels expected for their age. The rate of progress is accelerating, and this is starting to overcome the legacy of underachievement for some pupils, especially boys. The strongest improvements are in writing and



reading, especially in Years 6 and 7. However, the changes that have been introduced are at an early stage and are not yet fully embedded across the school, so although attainment in Key stage 2 tests in 2011 is likely to rise, the improvement is expected to be modest. The rate of attendance has risen substantially since the last inspection and is currently above average. Behaviour has also improved, with a reduction in both the number of incidents and the rate of exclusion. During the visit, without exception, pupils were courteous, friendly and very keen to talk about their learning. Any isolated incidents of poor behaviour are managed sensitively and effectively.

The school's leaders have made a successful effort to improve the quality of pupils' writing since the last inspection. Reorganisation of the curriculum has led to more opportunities for extended writing outside literacy sessions, and ensures that topics are included that will specifically appeal to boys. The profile of writing in the school has been raised with more displays of pupils' work, visits from authors and a reward system linked to writing. All these developments have contributed to better motivation amongst pupils, increased output of written work and improved quality. The school has effectively used strengths in English teaching in the school, especially from the subject leader, to provide training and coaching for teachers to develop their skills. As a result, the quality of teaching, especially in literacy, is improving. Curriculum planning has yet to show an impact on raising pupils' attainment in literacy over time and as a result comprehensive tracking of opportunities for pupils' skills development is not yet sufficiently secure.

The school has a tracking system to record assessment data regularly. Although formal calculations to show pupils' progress are made only annually, individual teachers use this information to identify those who are underachieving. Each term, in discussion with senior leaders, a small group of pupils in every class is selected to receive individualised support and their progress then monitored carefully. As a result of this new system, some pupils are now making much faster progress because their needs are being met. The school is not yet, however, involving parents and carers in supporting this process.

A relatively high proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Provision for these pupils is comprehensive and personalised, although some teachers are not able to support those who have low literacy skills because they are not sufficiently trained in phonics (the sounds that letters make). In lessons, teachers plan activities for these students which meet their needs so they make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. A large team of well-trained teaching assistants provides support within the classroom, for small groups and for individuals. Over time, although teachers monitor pupils' progress regularly, the school's leaders only have annual data, so monitoring the impact of short-term interventions is less robust. Some teachers are still not routinely providing work of sufficient challenge for those pupils who are more able.



Most pupils' books seen during the visit showed marking that was helpful and clearly identified strengths and areas for improvement. However, the way in which this marking is done is not consistent across the school, and the marking policy does not make expectations clear. Pupils say that marking is most effective and has the maximum impact on their progress when it is carried out promptly and when they have the opportunity to act on the advice they have been given. Sometimes, teachers are not checking back to make sure that the targets they have set have been met. In writing in other subjects, teachers are not consistently correcting pupils' literacy mistakes and misconceptions as they arise. The objectives of lessons are not always sufficiently focused on the quality of learning and as a result pupils are not always clear exactly what they need to do in order to produce the best quality work in that lesson. They are, however, generally aware of specific personal targets, especially linked to their writing. The presentation of pupils' work remains very variable, with some boys, in particular, taking less care and finding the physical act of writing challenging because their pencil grip is poor. This is not routinely picked up or tackled by teachers.

The senior team and subject leaders are monitoring the school's work very regularly. They consider the quality of marking and pupils' work, teachers' planning and their teaching. Although the amount of monitoring has increased and is robust, the systems for evaluating findings, which then lead to appropriate planning, review and training, currently lack coherence. Overall, the improvements in attainment and progress both in writing and for boys demonstrate satisfactory progress towards developing the capacity to continue making improvements.

The school has made very effective use of support from the National Strategies literacy adviser to improve the teaching of writing and the local authority has provided similar support for numeracy.

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

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

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

- Improve attainment and accelerate pupils' progress, with a particular focus on boys' writing, by:
 - providing higher levels of challenge for more-able pupils in all subjects
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' written work, including their handwriting and presentation
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subjects
 - ensuring that literacy lessons consistently engage the interest of boys.

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching across the school by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching regularly takes into account lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books, teachers' planning and the quality of marking
 - utilising teachers' existing strengths to spread good practice across the school
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information to plan work which matches the needs of all groups of pupils
 - improving teachers' marking so that it shows pupils clearly how to improve their work in all subjects.