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Mrs Jean Clark
Headteacher
Ghyllgrove Community Infant School
The Gore
Basildon
SS14 2BY

Dear Mrs Clark

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Ghyllgrove Community Infant School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 14 September 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the members of the governing body and to the pupils with whom I spoke.

Since the previous inspection, four teachers have left the school and new appointments have been made to replace them. One of the existing members of staff has taken on the role of managing the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, in place of one of the teachers who has left.

As a result of the inspection in January 2011, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The assessments taken by pupils at the end of Year 2 showed improvement in 2011, particularly for those pupils of average and below-average ability. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards is now closer to the national average, though most of the school's targets were not achieved. In mathematics in 2011, however, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher levels was the same as nationally in 2010. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, assessments dipped compared with 2010. This was largely because of the performance in one of the two classes. Robust actions have been taken to remedy this, although it is too soon to judge their impact.

The improved standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 2 are a result of a number of factors. There has been particularly thorough analysis of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and a concerted effort has been made to redress the weaknesses. A six-weekly programme of assessments has been established to ensure that pupils are making the progress that they should be. More effective support is being given to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A register of such students has been established in the last year and assessments of their areas of need have been carried out. The plans for the pupils' development make good use of these, so that those who work with the pupils have a much clearer idea of precisely what support they require.

The school's monitoring last year identified some lessons in which pupils' progress was inadequate. Steps have been taken to improve this. Very early indications suggest some success. Lessons certainly now have a clear sense of purpose. Guided reading is better focussed, and pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Although teachers' expectations of what pupils can do have been raised, there is some evidence that the more-able pupils are not consistently receiving work that challenges them sufficiently. Nevertheless, pupils' work in English, for example, shows clear progress in the quality of handwriting, the complexity of written work, and in their vocabulary. On some occasions, when pupils are achieving the objectives for their learning, there is not fast enough recognition of this by the teacher so that they can move onto more challenging work. Teachers' marking has improved. It is clearly written, well-expressed and usually unambiguous. There are occasions when it has led to improved learning. This is not consistent, however. Some very good advice given to pupils on how to improve the complexity of their sentences was not taken, for example, and monitoring did not identify and remedy this. The assessment of pupils' understanding by their teachers during lessons is generally at least satisfactory, but there are occasions when misconceptions that could be readily identified are not, and so go uncorrected.

Information from pupils' assessments are used well to make generalisations about teaching groups' overall strengths and weaknesses so that improvements can be brought about. For example, it was discovered in mathematics that there was a weakness in pupils' application of what they had learned. This was subsequently given more attention, to good effect. The assessments of pupils who are at an early stage of the acquisition of English are not sufficient to base challenging targets on.

The headteacher has initiated much good practice, for example in introducing more monitoring of the work of the school. There is frequent monitoring of teaching quality and of the progress that pupils are making. In addition, thorough monitoring by subject coordinators and by the leader responsible for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been introduced; it is leading to

improvements in provision. While monitoring is thorough, it does not have a strong enough emphasis on how pupils' learning is benefiting from the changes being introduced. An area that remains a concern is pupils' attendance. Although it has improved in the last year, despite a serious outbreak of illness that affected more than 50 pupils, it is low. The headteacher is aware of this and has taken some significant steps to bring about further improvement.

Governance is now much stronger. There are no longer vacancies on the governing body and its members are much more involved in monitoring the school's progress and in visiting lessons and speaking with the school's leaders about their work. The governing body provides greater challenge and support than previously. It has conducted an audit of the school's contribution to community cohesion and is in the process, with partner schools, of drawing up an action plan to improve this work.

The local authority has provided good support. This has included training for leaders, including governors, and a thorough evaluation of the progress the school is making. Its plan for improving the school is fit for purpose and is leading to the necessary improvements being made.

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

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2011

- Raise attainment in reading, mathematics and, particularly, in writing by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do
 - ensuring that pupils are properly focused on reading activities during their guided reading sessions
 - encouraging pupils to routinely check their own and each other's spellings and punctuation and to take greater care with the presentation of their work
 - reducing the reliance on worksheets and giving pupils more opportunities to use and apply what they learn in literacy by writing in other subjects
 - teachers consistently modelling accurate punctuation and spelling when marking work
 - clearly distinguishing standard English from colloquial English and local dialect.

- Ensure that pupils of all abilities make good progress in the very large majority of lessons by making full use of assessment information to plan lessons so that:
 - work is carefully matched to pupils' different capabilities and individual needs
 - pupils build steadily on what they have learnt before and none are repeating work they have already done
 - pupils are not expected to listen passively to long lesson introductions that slow the pace of learning
 - all pupils have clear guidance through their targets and through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work

- Increase the effectiveness of governance by:
 - ensuring that members of the governing body check the school's provision first-hand and are not just dependent on reports from school leaders and

staff

- setting challenging but realistic targets for attainment, rigorously monitoring performance against those targets and holding the school to account when any identifiable groups of pupils fall behind
- evaluating the impact of the school's contribution to community cohesion and ensuring that pupils learn about other cultures and ways of life in the United Kingdom and the wider world.