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30 November 2011

Miss Bulger
Headteacher
Larkrise Primary School
Dorset Avenue
Great Baddow
Chelmsford
CM2 9UB

Dear Miss Bulger

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Larkrise Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 29 November 2011 with Penny Spencer, additional inspector, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to the pupils and the members of the senior leadership team who gave their time to talk to us.

There have been several staff changes since the last inspection and the senior leadership team has been reorganised with the appointment of new coordinators for Key Stage 2, literacy and school improvement.

As a result of the inspection on 9 June 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

A good range of strategies contributes to improving attendance. These include the use of a positive award scheme for children, newsletters, first-day calling and the employment of a home school officer, working with families with significant social or medical needs to support good attendance. The school has been particularly successful in reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent. Consequently, attendance is rising strongly.

Steady progress is being made in improving all areas of learning, ensuring that attainment in both English and mathematics is rising. Attainment is still low at the

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end of Year 2 and Year 6 but the gap is closing. Current data, for both Year 2 and Year 6, shows pupils to be on track to achieve close to the national average in both English and mathematics in summer 2012. Progress for all current Year 6 pupils is now at least good. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by an increasingly skilled workforce of support staff. Children are engaged in their learning and work collaboratively together. Good use is made of talk partners to enhance understanding. The recent introduction of strategies to involve more passive learners is starting to have a positive impact. For example, the use of 'lollystick lotto', where children's names are picked from a tin rather than using a 'hands up' approach, was observed to be effective in keeping children focussed during class discussions and when children were being asked to report back on their learning.

Recent changes to the curriculum, better use of practical approaches to mathematics teaching and the introduction of initiatives such as a 'Dads and Lads workshop' are having an impact on raising the achievement of boys, and the gap is narrowing between their achievement and that of girls. In the best lessons, higher ability pupils are challenged appropriately and work is adapted well to meet the needs and requirements of pupils with different abilities. School leaders are aware that the next step is to increase the proportion of pupils who make accelerated progress, especially towards the higher levels of attainment. Improved understanding by teachers in the use of assessment data, and a more rigorous approach by senior leaders to holding teachers accountable, are leading to better provision for pupils identified as underperforming. The balance of teacher talk and independent activity by pupils has been rigorously addressed by the senior leadership team. The positive impact of this was evident in lessons.

The increase in numbers within the school of children from different ethnic communities, coupled with changes to the curriculum, mean that all children are gaining a better understanding of cultural diversity. New topics have increased opportunities for children to learn about other cultures, and displays around the school promote equality and diversity positively. Links with other schools are still developing but recent upgrades to the information and communications technology infrastructure mean that these can now develop more rapidly. The increased numbers of pupils from a broader range of cultural backgrounds offers untapped opportunities to share their cultures.

Since the last inspection, the school has benefitted from significant support from the local authority. Initially this was part of an intensive programme. This support has now decreased as the headteacher and her team are becoming increasingly more skilled in addressing any areas of underperformance and developing robust systems for improvement.

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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Reduce levels of absence, particularly of those pupils who are persistently absent for trivial reasons, so that attendance levels are closer to the national average by July 2011.
- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' achievement by:
 - sustaining the good quality of learning evident in most lessons
 - ensuring a more effective balance between teachers' input and the time for pupils to work independently
 - providing work which challenges the more-able pupils earlier in lessons.
- Narrow the gap between the attainment of boys and girls in mathematics at Key Stage 2 by:
 - planning further topics which engage boys and provide opportunities for them to practice, consolidate and apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - use the recently acquired materials for teaching mathematics to identify and address specific gaps in boys' numeracy skills.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to gain an understanding of cultural diversity by:
 - ensuring that this is given a stronger emphasis in the school's promotion of community cohesion
 - providing first-hand experiences for pupils to engage with children from different communities and diverse backgrounds within the United Kingdom and beyond.