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28 November 2011

Mr R Hudson  
Headteacher  
Falconhurst School  
High Trees  
Chaffron Way  
Eaglestone  
Milton Keynes  
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Dear Mr Hudson

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Falconhurst School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 November 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 the staff, pupils, parents, the local authority School Improvement Advisor, and the Chair and other members of the Governing Body who met with me during my visit.

The context and backgrounds of the school's pupils has continued to change significantly since the previous Section 5 inspection, reflecting the very high levels of inward and outward mobility of pupils at other than the normal times of admission and departure. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups has risen to a little less than half. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has risen sharply to just over a third. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has also continued to grow. There have been no changes in teaching staff, representing a marked change from the staffing instability noted in the previous inspection report. The governing body has a new Chair and six new members.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 July 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 good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The attainment of Year 6 pupils in national tests in English and mathematics in 2011 was low, and represented a sharp fall against the trend of steadily rising results over the previous seven years. The cohort of pupils who took the tests in 2011 had some exceptional characteristics; in particular, a high proportion joined the school well into Key Stage 2, including a high proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs. The school has achieved notable success in reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistent absentees, but persistent absence remained an issue for a very small but significant minority of Year 6 pupils who took the tests. School data suggests that overall pupils' progress accelerated in Year 6, but that their progress had been slower earlier in Key Stage 2.

Currently, pupils in Year 6 are on course to attain test results much closer to the national average in both English and mathematics. In a mathematics lesson seen in this inspection, Year 6 pupils demonstrated a sound grasp of fractions and percentages and began to apply this well to a problem of designing the layout of a garden. In an English lesson, Year 6 pupils collaborated very well to produce some powerful empathetic writing about a disaster survivor. Across the school, pupils' basic skills of numeracy and literacy benefit from the much-improved clarity of the whole-school policy on calculation, and a very well-structured approach to guided reading. The school recognises the need for greater consistency of approaches in its phonics programme to teach pupils how to link sounds and letters, although pupils mostly use phonics successfully in helping them to read and write. Beyond English and mathematics, topic work still does not systematically offer enough regular high-quality opportunities to progressively develop pupils' basic skills.

Senior leaders, together with leaders of English and mathematics, regularly and rigorously monitor pupils' progress and teachers' consistent implementation of whole-school policies. Leaders make very effective use of assessment data to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils. They use this information to provide additional support where needed, both to individual pupils and to the teaching in specific classes. Regular meetings between leaders and staff focus wholly on pupil progress and further ensure that staff at all levels are accountable for pupils' achievement. Fortnightly book checks by subject leaders and regular lesson observations by senior leaders inform their very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and enable them to shape clear and well-focused improvement plans. Some improvements are yet to have full impact and there remains some unevenness in outcomes for pupils, but overall strengths in leadership and management are yielding better consistency in the quality of provision. The school has received well-focused and effective support from the local authority in developing its self-evaluation and planning systems, in monitoring and developing teaching, and in training the new members of the governing body.

The large majority of teaching is now well planned to provide effective challenge for pupils across the attainment range. Work is systematically adapted to reflect pupils' differing prior attainment, and lessons often incorporate 'challenge tasks' to stretch



the more able. Pupils who need additional help, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language, have regular and detailed assessments to check that they receive the most appropriate support. Individual education plans offer highly specific targets against which pupils' progress can be measured with precision. Pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2 have very clear, specific and progressive targets for improvement in English and mathematics. Teachers assess pupils' work consistently against these targets, so that pupils are very much aware of what they need to demonstrate in their work in order to improve. When marking pupils' work, teachers' comments in most cases are helpful and informative, showing pupils what they have done well and where they need to improve. While a few inconsistencies remain, teachers have appropriately high expectations for the standards of pupils' work in their books and for their learning in class. Teachers are widely involved in moderation of their assessments with their colleagues within schools and in partner schools, enabling them to see and share good practice.

The school is involved in a number of projects, including with networks of local partner schools, to enable its pupils to better understand and celebrate diversity of background and culture. This includes an innovative project linking a Year 3/4 class with a class in another school to investigate and celebrate 'difference'.

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

Ian Hodgkinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2010.**

- By July 2011, improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
  - with immediate effect, all teachers mark work consistently and regularly so that pupils know and understand what they have to do to improve
  - lessons have consistently high expectations and appropriate levels of challenge
  - assessment data are used effectively to set and adapt work to meet the differing needs of pupils, particularly the more able, in each class
  - good practice is shared more widely.
  
- By July 2011, accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment by ensuring that:
  - basic skills are taught systematically across the school and build upon what pupils know and can do already
  - leaders at all levels monitor the impact of initiatives and ensure accountability at all levels.
  
- By July 2011, improve pupils' awareness of the cultural diversity in the United Kingdom so that pupils can gain first-hand experience of meeting pupils from other backgrounds and cultures.