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Ms Mary Wyatt
The Headteacher
Millpond Primary School
Baptist Street
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Dear Ms Wyatt

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 January 2012, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to everyone who assisted me during the day, including the pupils, staff, members of the governing body and the School Improvement Partner.

The school has experienced several changes since the previous inspection. Two teachers have left the school and been replaced. In September 2011, a new subject leader was appointed for mathematics and the membership of the senior leadership team was expanded. Three members of the governing body have also left and have been replaced.

As a result of the inspection on 9 and 10 November 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.

Achievement of pupils at the school

From low starting points, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is rising steadily across the school. The validated results from the 2011 end of key stage assessments were higher than the previous year for both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage

2. Inspection evidence confirms that increasing proportions of pupils are now reaching the levels expected for their age in all year groups. Although pupils' levels of attainment remain below the average, particularly in writing and in Year 5, the gaps are closing progressively. The school's current predictions confirm that pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 are on track to maintain the improving trend.

Pupils are making stronger progress in reading and writing than in mathematics because the actions taken to raise achievement are more established in these areas. The daily focus on early literacy skills and a reading intervention programme for targeted pupils are two actions that have made a positive difference. Similarly, there are more opportunities for pupils to recount stories and write for sustained periods. Pupils speak positively of the new arrangements to set pupils for mathematics and report that the work is more challenging. However, the school has rightly identified the need to accelerate the progress of girls. The well-established procedures to support those pupils whose first language is other than English ensure that they are making similar progress to their peers. Several pupils, parents and carers spoken to during the inspection commented positively on the support they had received when joining the school.

The quality of teaching

Pupils are making greater progress because the quality of teaching has improved. This is evident in work seen in a sample of books and the school's most recent assessment information. There is more good teaching taking place as a result of staff training and increased monitoring by leaders. Better use is made of assessment information so that pupils of different abilities are suitably challenged. Increasingly, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those at the early stages of speaking English, are supported well in lessons. In the most effective lessons seen, teachers' confident knowledge of subjects enabled them to demonstrate important skills and reshape tasks promptly when pupils failed to grasp the idea. Pupils were highly engaged and had plenty of opportunities to discuss their learning in pairs and small groups. In other lessons seen, pupils made less because the pace of learning was too leisurely and teachers did not question individuals incisively enough about their learning.

Pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for their own learning. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 literacy lesson. In this lesson, pupils worked independently and confidently to check their writing against symbols of the key features. The school's approach to marking pupils' work is becoming more consistent, particularly the use of colour-coded markers. While pupils respond to teachers' comments and make corrections, they are not given enough opportunities to evaluate their work against success criteria. The prevalence of photocopied sheets in mathematics books limits pupils' decisions on how to set out their work. Discussions with pupils confirm that they know their learning targets, but are not sufficiently clear about how their targets link to the learning in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils that spoke with the inspector reported that behaviour had improved. In all lessons seen, pupils were polite, attentive and keen to learn. Occasionally, the standard of pupils' behaviour slipped during less structured times such as at the end of playtime or when moving around the school site unsupervised.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The recently expanded leadership team is now playing a greater role in leading improvements and monitoring progress. The school's vision is shared widely amongst members and they are less reliant on the headteacher. Increasingly, teachers are held to account for the progress that pupils make and challenging targets are set for those pupils that need to make the greatest progress. Nevertheless, expectations for pupils in Key Stage 1 should be higher to ensure they are consistent with the rest of the school. The steady reduction in local authority support and the improving trends in pupils' achievement and attendance are evidence of the school's growing capacity for sustained improvement.

Members of the governing body are beginning to make a stronger contribution to the school's development. Training provided by the local authority has improved members' understanding of their role and school performance data. The committees that oversee the school's work have been restructured and an annual calendar ensures that key tasks are undertaken on a more regular basis. Levels of accountability are beginning to rise. For example, members have questioned leaders recently about several pupils that had not made the progress expected. However, the governing body is not systematically involved in planning for improvement and monitoring the school's performance. Monitoring reports do not provide sufficient information to enable members to ask the right questions. At the time of this monitoring inspection, secure arrangements were in place for checking the suitability of staff to work with children.

The school has drawn effectively on the support of external partners including that provided by the local authority. Members of staff praise the quality of the support and the difference it has made. For example, teachers have worked with staff from local schools to improve the consistency of assessments made in writing and mathematics. Consequently, assessment information is increasingly robust because teachers have a greater understanding of the expectations at each level.

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 Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment so that most pupils reach the expected levels in English and mathematics by further developing their reading, writing and comprehension skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better in the overwhelming majority of lessons in all year groups by:
 - making sure that there is a sharper match of work to pupils' different abilities
 - giving pupils more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to be more active and inquisitive in class.
- Ensure that all governors have the skills, expertise and confidence to enable them to play a robust and strong role in shaping the strategic direction of the school and in holding the school to account for its work.