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Mr L Murphy
Headteacher
Oaklands Junior School
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Chatham
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Dear Mr Murphy

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Oaklands Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 January 2012, for the time you gave to our preliminary meeting and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the assistant headteacher, other staff and pupils who took the time to meet with me during the day.

There have been significant changes in the school since the last inspection. The previous headteacher left in October 2011. Since then, the school has been led by an interim headteacher appointed by the local authority. A new headteacher has been appointed and will be joining the school in April 2012. The school was part of a federation with the infant school when it was inspected in 2010, but the two schools will be amalgamated from September 2012. There is significant building work underway to provide new facilities for the amalgamated school and to refurbish the existing buildings.

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

At the previous inspection, attainment was judged to be low. Although school leaders began to focus on raising standards immediately after the inspection, they were not successful in making a difference to the levels attained by Year 6 pupils in the 2011 statutory tests, and attainment for these pupils remained low. Significant improvements to leadership and management, teaching and learning and behaviour have led to accelerated progress being made in most classes since September 2011. In Year 6, most pupils are on track to achieve expected levels in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2012. The proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching higher levels (Level 5) is also on track to rise this year. The transition from the infant school has been managed well and pupils in Year 3 have made good progress since joining the school. Furthermore, school data indicate that most pupils in Year 4 have made good progress so far this year, particularly in reading and mathematics. School leaders are confident that assessment data are reliable and have undertaken a range of moderation exercises to check the accuracy of teachers' judgements. Progress in Year 5 has been hampered by staff illness, but school leaders are confident that rates of progress will recover now that teachers have returned to school full-time.

The school tracks the progress of groups rigorously. School leaders and class teachers assess the performance of different groups of pupils every term and, if there is any underachievement, they take decisive action. As a result, attainment is becoming more even across the school and gaps in attainment between different groups are closing. For example, boys are now making better progress, so that their attainment is more in line with that of the girls.

The quality of teaching

The school's monitoring and evaluation of teaching suggests that more teaching is now consistently good and this is one of the key reasons for better rates of progress for pupils. Although the quality of teaching seen during the inspection was satisfactory overall, there were good features in almost all the lessons visited. Teachers made sure that pupils understood what they would be learning in the lesson and the work set for pupils was generally pitched at the right level so that all pupils could succeed. The direct teaching of reading skills is undertaken in daily group-reading sessions and teachers plan more structured opportunities for writing in English lessons. In the best lessons seen during the inspection, teachers ensured that the pace of learning was brisk throughout and that all pupils were actively engaged in the lesson. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils enjoyed the competitive element of a quick quiz to start the lesson. They were all asked to choose appropriate units of measure for a variety of objects. The teacher then encouraged individual pupils to explain their thinking to the rest of the group before she revealed the correct answer. The activity was fast-paced and involved all the pupils.

One of the assistant headteachers has been working alongside teachers to develop their skills in planning, supporting them to develop coherent units of work that build upon pupils' prior learning. As a result, work in lessons is better matched to pupils' needs and abilities and pupils say that they are enjoying their lessons more. Teachers say they value the support they have received to improve their practice and appreciate the clear guidance they are given at pupil progress review meetings. School leaders recognise that inconsistencies remain in the use of targets and the quality of marking and feedback to pupils across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The introduction of a new behaviour management policy has had a significant impact on the pace of learning in lessons. Pupils report that the 'It's Good to be Green' system is applied consistently and say that, since its introduction, behaviour is typically good in most lessons. The interim headteacher and senior staff now have a clear focus on improving behaviour outside on the playground. There are plans to provide more play equipment for pupils and to train midday supervisors to lead games and activities.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

Since his appointment, the interim headteacher has acted quickly to accelerate the drive for improvement and has already been able to demonstrate the impact of his work in raising standards and improving behaviour. The morale of staff is now good. He has ensured that the roles of other senior leaders are clear and they now make a full contribution to school improvement. Even middle leaders who are relatively new in post can demonstrate the impact of their work. Rigorous systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, and senior leaders give high-quality feedback to teachers so that they understand how they can improve.

School leaders are building a culture of high expectation for all and school development plans have challenging targets for attainment and progress. The governing body receive regular reports on progress from the headteacher and ask challenging questions. They are involved in formulating policy and carry out some monitoring visits. For example, the Chair of the Governing Body has monitored the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils and has visited classes. The governing body are aware that there is more to be done to develop this area of their work so that governors can evaluate the school's work for themselves, without relying on reports from school leaders.

The local authority has increased its support since the last inspection and ensured that an interim headteacher was in place following the unexpected retirement of the previous post-holder. Local authority advisers have worked closely with senior staff to provide well-targeted training and support. This has been well received by staff.

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

Melanie Knowles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of pupils reaching average and higher levels and ensuring individual pupils' attainment is even
 - increasing the direct teaching of literacy skills for lower-attaining pupils and ensuring tasks build on pupils' literacy skills on entry to Year 3
 - improving pupils' spelling and punctuation skills.

- Increase the consistency of good teaching and learning by developing teachers' skills in assessing pupils' learning and progress so they can plan activities consistently well for all abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Ensure all those with leadership responsibilities focus rigorously on improving the academic outcomes for pupils by:
 - rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and the progress of pupils from different ability groups
 - ensuring the school improvement plan shows clear monitoring and evaluation criteria, including attainment targets for different years.