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Mr A Jenner
Headteacher
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Parkhurst Road
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Dear Mr Jenner

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Penny Spencer, Additional Inspector, and I inspected your school on 26 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to staff and pupils for taking the time to talk to us.

As a result of the inspection on 22 March 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 has made good progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills and understanding that are well below the levels expected for their age. Pupil attainment is significantly below average and fluctuates between year groups because of the high numbers of pupils joining and leaving part-way through their education, many of whom are at the early stages of learning English. By the time they leave the school pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally given their starting points. Assessment information to track and monitor individual children's progress is being used more consistently in the Early Years Foundation Stage than at the time of the previous inspection. Assessments are more rigorous and frequent and staff have a better understanding of their accountability for the progress of the children they work with. Outcomes and provision in the Reception classes have improved because planning is more effective at matching activities to the children's learning needs and in providing more opportunities to extend learning in the outdoor area.

Assessment information is used consistently well in English to plan tasks and activities that engage and meet the individual needs of pupils and to support their literacy development. Individual learning targets are carefully reviewed by teachers and pupils so that the next steps in their learning are clearly identified. Assessment information and individual learning targets are used less consistently in mathematics and in other subjects so that progress is more variable in lessons and across year groups. Assessment information to monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those with statements of special educational needs for autism, is used well to target support and intervention.

The quality of teaching

Effective action has been taken since the last inspection to improve the quality and consistency of learning through targeted professional development and the sharing of good practice. Teaching was good in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection and satisfactory in all others. The quality of learning is improving because the planning of teaching is more consistent in identifying learning outcomes and letting pupils know what they need to do to be successful in their learning. Where teaching is consistently good it helps to accelerate the progress of pupils who have fallen behind in previous years or who are new to the school or to learning English. In lessons where learning is no better than satisfactory, the same work is set for the whole class so the potentially high-attaining students are not always fully stretched and those with additional learning needs find it too difficult. A full review of marking and feedback by the whole staff has improved practice so that there is a clearer understanding of developmental marking and greater consistency across the school. Marking is particularly strong in English where pupils are shown precisely what they need to do to improve their work and encouraged to evaluate their own progress. Visualisers are being used well in Years 5 and 6 to model pupils' work and identify learning points and to reinforce the basic rules of spelling and grammar. Marking is completed regularly in other subjects but opportunities to support the development of literacy and numeracy through marking are not being used consistently.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A safe, inclusive environment where all students are valued as individuals contributes positively to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils report that they feel safe in school and that they get on well together. They are polite and friendly and conduct themselves well around the school and in the playground. Their good behaviour makes a strong contribution to learning in lessons where expectations are high and they are challenged to achieve their best work. Even in lessons where activities are not so well matched to their learning needs they maintain high levels of concentration and motivation. Strategies to manage behaviour are being used consistently. The school is taking effective action to improve attendance, which is average, and to reduce persistent absence by building stronger links with parents and carers through initiating community events.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

Leaders and managers have made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection and in sustaining capacity for improvement. There has been a relentless focus on raising attainment, particularly in English and mathematics and to support the development of literacy across the school. Leaders and managers hold regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress and to review targets. Outcomes are linked more closely to the quality of learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Assessment information is being used to analyse reasons for underachievement and to readjust priorities. Recommendations from the previous report and the outcomes of a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning have been used to inform targeted professional development and support for staff at all levels. This is increasing the proportion of good teaching. Coordinators are involved in monitoring and evaluating performance in their subjects and across the key stages. However, this is not embedded sufficiently to make all teaching and learning consistently good.

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

Anne Wellham
Her Majesty's Inspector

■ Annex

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

Secure better achievement for all pupils by:

- developing teachers' use of marking so pupils always understand exactly what to do to improve their work and know the next steps in their learning
- building on the best practice already seen in some classes for setting individual targets that help to ensure all pupils know how to improve their work in mathematics and English.

Accelerate pupils' progress by:

- making better use of assessment information in the planning process to ensure that lessons always challenge and engage pupils well, particularly the most able
- ensuring that the monitoring by all leaders is thorough enough to secure consistently good or better teaching across the school.

Improve outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:

- developing the outdoor learning environment so that children are active learners at all times
- making better use of assessment information to ensure all activities on offer in the Reception classes are closely matched to next steps in children's learning.