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Mrs J Marshall
The Headteacher
Hertford Junior School
Lynchet Close
Brighton
BN1 7FP

Dear Mrs Marshall

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Hertford Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 May 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. As a result of the inspection on 13 October 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils' achievement continues to improve because teaching is more effective and the curriculum is more appropriate. Their attainment remains below the national average in key areas such as English and mathematics, but the gap is closing. Lower attaining groups, for example pupils with special educational needs, are beginning to catch up with others. However, pupils are not making the increased progress over time needed so that older ones rapidly reverse past underachievement, and all build well on their attainment when they join the school. In lessons pupils enjoy their learning more, engaging more deeply in tasks and aiming for targets which are more challenging. Pupils learn best when they understand the features of high quality work so they can take a lead in deciding what to do next and how to improve. There are still too many occasions where this is not the case and their progress is slower. Pupils' literacy levels are improving, although remain below average. Better speaking and listening skills enable pupils to discuss their ideas more fully. Improving confidence in writing is helping, for example when making notes in lessons, although the many basic errors made in spelling and punctuation reflect pupils' weak past progress.

Teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement are rising. Improved assessment information is available to staff, so lessons are better planned to meet pupils' varied needs and set more challenging targets. This remains variable with some teachers still not expecting enough of pupils or adjusting activities to stretch those of differing ability. Aims of lessons are now routinely shared with pupils. This is most effective when the aims are generated with pupils so they understand how to achieve well. Increased use of discussion is improving pupils' speaking and listening skills, notably through the use of talk partners. Most lessons involve logical sequences of tasks. These stimulate good learning when progressively raising the level of challenge, but this is inconsistent. In some lessons pupils do not know the next steps in learning and do too much work of the same level. Improved systems for informing pupils about their targets and progress include 'learning walls' with class targets, and tracking sheets with better marking in books. Teachers vary in how well they apply these routines, but practice is improving. Good features are emerging such as pupils referring to marking before moving on. Pupils say they feel more involved in assessing their learning by recording their progress onto tracking sheets. Teachers are better at checking progress during lessons via questioning and observation. In the more effective lessons, they use what they find to tackle common weaknesses, and to share good work. However, weaker progress is not identified and remedied in all lessons, and small-group work led by additional adults is not always monitored sufficiently by teachers. Additional support for pupils making slow progress over time in areas such as reading is improving in quality. Checks on progress are used more carefully to trigger extra help and check the impact made.

Some effective action is being taken to improve pupils' attendance and consequently it is rising. Pupils welcome the school's emphasis on rewarding good attendance. Staff work hard with families where there are concerns and no longer authorise holidays in term time. Attendance data are more astutely used to identify pupils whose attendance is falling, so as to target support. The school is analysing the attendance of different pupil groups more closely, but is not yet using the outcomes to focus its work.

Improvements to the curriculum are boosting achievement. Thematically linked topics are adapted increasingly well to suit pupils' interests, and pupils like having learning in different subjects connected together. They enjoy visitors coming in and the increased number of visits they make to places like London. Developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through learning in other subjects is improving, although some opportunities are still missed to build their learning effectively.

The headteacher is successfully sustaining the focus of staff on raising attainment. She plays a central role in managing external support provided to the school by the local authority. Under her leadership, monitoring and evaluation continue to strengthen, with better checking of teaching and analysis of assessment information. Governors are improving their skills in challenging leaders over pupils' achievement, but do not always ask for enough concrete evidence of the progress claimed. Leaders' lesson observations of teaching rightly pay greater attention to pupils'

learning. Areas for improvement are more clearly identified and used to better effect to plan staff training. Nevertheless, some feedback to staff is still too ambiguous about whether pupils made enough progress, so as to drive improvement faster. Subject leaders are more involved in monitoring their subjects and have a clearer grasp of what needs to be done. Strategic plans include more sharply-focused actions and impact measures. Useful documents such as 'spotlight' plans clarify the most pressing areas of need and help focus everyone's efforts. Longer-term planning, for example into next year, lacks the detail required to show how the gains made so far will be built on and the pace of change accelerated further.

Support from the local authority has made a satisfactory impact and the statement of action is fit for purpose. An appropriate range of local authority personnel and staff from other local schools are working effectively with school leaders. Suitable steps are taken to monitor the impact of provision and adjust what is offered.

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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' attainment and progress through substantially increasing the proportion of good lessons by:
 - ensuring all teachers check regularly during lessons that pupils have understood the work and are engaging with their learning
 - ensuring that the pace of learning is consistently good throughout lessons
 - making sure teachers provide challenging work that matches the needs of pupils of all abilities
 - making sure teachers have high expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work.
- Sharpen the skills and knowledge of subject leaders by:
 - ensuring that, through rigorous monitoring, they gain a detailed knowledge of pupils' attainment and progress in their subject area across the school
 - making sure that subject development plans use specific success criteria which allow the impact of actions taken to be measured easily
 - ensuring action plans show clearly where their subject supports whole-school priorities.
- Build further on current efforts to improve attendance.
- Enhance the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning and progress in literacy and numeracy by:
 - developing more cross-curricular links that make learning relevant for pupils
 - ensuring that opportunities are maximised to reinforce pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.