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Jane Macey
Headteacher
Hamstreet Primary School
Hamstreet
Ashford
TN26 2EA

Dear Mrs Macey

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Hamstreet Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass my sincere thanks to the pupils, governors, the key stage leaders, subject coordinators and local authority officer who generously gave of their time to speak with me.

Since the last inspection, the school's long standing partnership with the local schools Ashford Collaborative Enterprise has been strengthened by the addition of a peripatetic assistant headteacher appointed in January 2012. He is based in one of the primary schools. This post has contributed to staff development and shared approaches to teaching and appraisal between the four schools. During the last year, there has been some instability in staffing in Year 5.

As a result of the inspection on 12–13 January 2012, 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.

Following the last inspection, senior leaders carried out an in-depth analysis and correctly identified that significant weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics have resulted in a number of pupils underachieving across the school. This is especially the case for higher attaining pupils. The national results in 2012 indicated that attainment at Key Stage 1 was similar to the previous year, and broadly in line with the national average, but had declined at Key Stage 2 to below the national average. In Key Stage 1, pupils of lower and middle abilities made good progress in English and mathematics, but higher-attaining pupils made less than expected progress in

mathematics. In Key Stage 2, middle-attaining pupils made good progress in reading and writing, but higher-attaining pupils made significantly less than expected progress in both mathematics and English. This meant that attainment in 2012 at Level 5 was well-below average. The school recognises that more pupils should be attaining the higher levels in mathematics and English in both key stages. Consequently, senior leaders are rightly prioritising training to focus on mathematics, and in particular, they are providing additional lessons for the teaching of more-able pupils in English and mathematics. Improved use of data and systematic monitoring by senior leaders ensures that staff can identify in which year group and ability level, a pupil's progress has plateaued or receded. The school acknowledges that consistently accelerated progress, especially in mathematics, remains necessary to address the legacy of underachievement.

Some instability in staffing has slowed the progress towards improving the proportion of good and better teaching. Observations by the inspector with the headteacher confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching is still too variable. Discussion with the local authority supported this view. The school's previous policy of withdrawing pupils from their mathematics lessons for literacy interventions has helped them improve their literacy skills. However, pupils missed important elements of mathematics teaching and this has resulted in gaps in their understanding of structures and relationships in number. A number of pupils, observed during the visit, lacked confidence in their calculation skills. Some showed a weak understanding of place value and fluency in mental methods, and recall of number facts, such as multiplication tables.

Through the Ashford Collaborative Enterprise and visits to other schools to observe good practice, staff have introduced different teaching approaches. The establishment of the 'Big Write five years ago, has led to a much greater emphasis on pupils' handwriting and their written presentation skills. Over time, this has led to marked improvements in the quality of writing across the year groups. The use of 'Talk' sessions in class before writing has sharpened the quality of pupils' self-expression and their verbal responses. The marking of pupils' work, although much improved in relation to their writing tasks, does not always provide structured guidance and follow-up actions. This is particularly the case in mathematics.

Planning does not yet cater consistently for the range of abilities in each class. As a result, the activities do not always ensure sufficient challenge is provided in pupils' learning. This is especially evident in some mathematics lessons in Key Stage 1, where teachers do not extend pupils' learning through hands-on experiences of comparing and calculating with numbers and quantities. In Key Stage 2, teachers in mathematics are not always quick to recognise and intervene in a focused way when pupils encounter difficulties. This means that misconceptions impede the next steps in learning. There is now greater emphasis on accurate assessment of pupils and the setting of appropriate targets. All teachers have a clear class profile with each pupil's prior attainment level and current target. However, when senior leaders monitor pupils' progress in lessons, they do not always ensure that lesson activities and tasks are well matched to these individual pupil targets.

The school has made good progress in improving younger pupils' reading skills, Older pupils are demonstrably more adept in using the linking of letters and sounds (systematic phonics) for accurate spelling and reading for meaning. Parents and carers are much more involved in their children's reading through home-school records. The school has worked effectively with the small minority of families of latecomers in the mornings. Attendance is now above average and punctuality, vastly improved.

The school has strengthened capacity in governance and leadership. Self-evaluation processes are noticeably more accurate and testify to a school that knows itself well. Middle leadership is still developing. In particular, the school has recently recognised that the capacity of the leadership in mathematics requires further strengthening. In the light of the significant improvement that is urgently needed in this subject, the peripatetic assistant headteacher is now planning more focused actions with staff. To increase accountability further, the school's performance management processes are revised in line with the new Teaching Standards and the link to pupil performance targets. The governing body has been proactive in monitoring the school through utilising its members' skills. A Parent Council is helping to raise families' aspirations of what their children can achieve and governors are encouraging greater involvement by parents and carers in their children's learning.

The local authority's statement of action was judged by Her Majesty's Inspectors to be fit for purpose. The first progress review meeting took place six months after the inspection. This has meant that the school has not received timely support in monitoring the impact of its actions. Currently, officers are planning to carry out a mathematics audit in the school using a subject specialist.

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
Meena Kumari Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching to over 75% by January 2013, through:
 - accurate assessment of pupils' current knowledge and understanding
 - ensuring pupils are consistently challenged by the level of work
 - informative marking of pupils' work to support improved outcomes
 - setting higher expectations for the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their written work.
- Improve leadership and management, and the pace of school improvement, by:
 - ensuring self-evaluation is accurate, particularly in relation to attainment, progress and the quality of teaching
 - setting higher expectations for the progress pupils make and the quality of their work
 - ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and of pupils' learning are rigorous and challenging
 - holding staff accountable for the progress pupils make.