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18 October 2012

Judith Lunn
Headteacher
The Alderton Junior School
Alderton Hall Lane
Loughton
Essex
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Dear Mrs Lunn

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of The Alderton Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, members of the governing body and the local authority representative who gave up their time to talk to me.

Since the previous inspection, one teacher has retired. A temporary appointment has been made for this term and a permanent appointment is due to be made shortly.

As a result of the inspection on 25 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 good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils' progress in mathematics and English has improved throughout the school. Over the last year, pupils in all year groups have been learning at a faster rate and this has helped them make up for their slower progress in previous years. Pupils' behaviour remains good and attendance has improved to above average.

Standards are now broadly average. The 2012 results of national tests show a considerable improvement in mathematics compared to 2011, with results being maintained in English. Compared to national figures, an above-average proportion of pupils made the progress expected during the junior school years. The proportion

making better than expected progress was average in mathematics, but below average in English.

The improvements are due to a number of changes. Most importantly, the headteacher has set higher expectations for how much pupils should learn, especially in Years 3 and 4. Senior leaders now have a relentless focus on improving standards for pupils. They meet regularly with class teachers to discuss each pupil in turn, and to plan extra support for any pupils who are falling behind. In addition, extra training has helped teachers to improve their skills in explaining mathematical ideas, questioning pupils to check their understanding, and marking pupils' work.

Mathematics teaching is now much better than at the time of the last inspection. Pupils are not simply told what to do. Teachers now try to give them ways of thinking for themselves. For example, Year 5 pupils played a 'tug-of-war' dice game where they moved a counter along a number line marked with positive and negative numbers. This introduced a good way of thinking about how to add and subtract when negative numbers are involved. Teachers also think more carefully about whether pupils are ready to take the next step in a topic. For example, a Year 4 teacher made sure that pupils were confident in multiplying by multiples of 10 and 100 before showing them how these skills can be combined to multiply two and three digit numbers using the grid method. Increasingly, pupils are challenged to use their knowledge to solve problems. For example, Year 6 pupils applied their knowledge of converting units to solve problems where some of the weights were given in kilograms and others in grams.

The mathematics coordinator leads the subject well. She has grown into the role she took on just over a year ago, thanks to the support she has received from other senior staff, from the local authority and an educational consultant. She knows a lot about the strengths and weaknesses of mathematics teaching because she observes lessons and makes frequent checks of pupils' books. She follows up any issues in her regular one-to-one meetings with class teachers.

Marking has improved in mathematics. Teachers write comments on pupils' work to show them how to improve. Sometimes they set follow-up questions to check pupils' understanding. Pupils are encouraged to write notes to the teacher to seek more help or to say they understand well. As a result, pupils are more aware of how well they are getting on in mathematics.

Pupils who are very good at mathematics are being pushed harder in lessons. They say that the work set for them is more difficult, and therefore more satisfying, but that some lessons are still too easy for them. The pupils also welcome the extra mathematical activities, such as the mathematics club, national and local mathematics competitions and the 'Mathprentice' day, based on *The Apprentice* television programme.

Teachers are making a big effort to link mathematics to other subjects, such as science, music and history. Mathematical links are now a regular part of their lesson

plans. Displays in classrooms and public areas celebrate mathematics and give it a high profile. Parents have been encouraged to support pupils' learning in mathematics through special sessions where they learn alongside their children.

The school improvement plan sets out clearly how the school intends to meet its targets and become a good school. Senior leaders and the governing body keep a close eye on the progress being made and adapt the plan where necessary. For example, they recognise that further improving progress in English is now a priority.

Recent training has given governors a better understanding of their role in making strategic decisions, ensuring sound finances and in holding senior leaders to account. Governors are aware that to ask the right questions, they need to be better at understanding achievement data, and they have arranged some relevant training.

Governors know how the school spends the extra funding it receives for looked-after pupils and those known to be eligible for free school meals. Most of the money is used directly to support the pupils it is intended to help, for example to provide a lunchtime reading club, to enable them to take part in educational visits and for extra help with English and mathematics. The latest results show that there is no longer a gap in attainment between these pupils and others in the school.

The local authority provides good support for the school. Its statement of action is well integrated with the school's own improvement plan and its advisers have helped to improve mathematics teaching, subject leadership and the accuracy of assessment. In addition, the school has worked with an educational consultant and made visits to successful schools. The headteacher has managed the different strands of support carefully, to make sure that they work together well.

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 Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' progress in mathematics so that attainment is at least average by the end of Year 6 in 2012 by:
 - introducing a rigorous programme to develop staff subject knowledge and expertise in teaching mathematics and monitoring its impact
 - developing teachers' questioning skills and ensure mathematical concepts are clearly explained and taught effectively
 - consistently challenging the more able pupils so that they achieve to the best of their ability
 - planning for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across all subjects
 - providing more effective feedback through marking on the steps pupils need to take to meet their targets
 - identifying pupils with particular talent in mathematics and providing programmes to extend their learning.