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Mrs Dawn Shilston
The Headteacher
Orchard Fields Community School
Edmunds Road
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 0QT

Dear Mrs Shilston

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Orchard Fields Community School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and pupils gave me when I inspected your school on 7 November 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body and to your school improvement officer for their contributions.

Since the last inspection there has been a variety of changes. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is on long-term sick leave and has been temporarily replaced by an early years specialist seconded from the local authority. A teacher who was on long-term sick leave has returned to the school. The senior leadership team has been reconstituted to include six key teachers and the newly appointed office manager. Several teachers have changed year groups, one has left and a newly qualified teacher has been appointed. Significant improvements have been made to outdoor learning facilities for Nursery and Reception. The way teaching assistants are utilised in the afternoon sessions has been reorganised so that rather than giving in-class support, assistants work with individual pupils or groups outside classrooms. The deputy headteacher is no longer a class teacher. She now is responsible for coordinating special educational needs provision across the school.

As a result of the inspection on 22 March 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 pupils' achievement.

Substantial improvements to the way pupils' work is assessed and recorded have had a marked impact on teachers' understanding of what pupils know, can do and understand. Accurate analysis of data by senior leaders is used systematically to support teachers and their assistants in providing effective help for all pupils. This has been most successful with regard to the high profile of pupils with special educational needs, especially through the newly introduced intervention programmes applied during the afternoon sessions. Despite the proportions of pupils who reach above average levels still being well below average, the overall profile of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 is rising and, this year, the school has met government floor targets. Standards in mathematics have been the most improved, with attainment now broadly average at the end of Year 6. Data and school records show that the current Year 6 pupils started school with levels of skills and experience well below those expected nationally. In addition to this, this year group has notable gaps in learning in English and mathematics which are the legacy of historical weaknesses in provision. It is also the case that over 55% of this age group have special educational needs. Consequently, it is unlikely that attainment levels will be substantially improved in 2013, but there are strong indications that Year 6 pupils make at least expected rates of progress. An appreciable minority are doing better than this because of improvements to teaching and support.

Across all year groups, expectations of what pupils are capable of in terms of work and behaviour have been raised and the school is setting itself more challenging targets. A good example of the success of this is reflected in the fact that three pupils achieved the higher Level 6 this summer in mathematics. However, despite the introduction of new planning and schemes, which for example have particularly benefited reading across the school, Key Stage 1 attainment is still significantly below average and continues to be a key area for development.

Improvements to teaching are the result of good progress in leadership and management. Robust monitoring and evaluating of strengths and weaknesses now involve middle leaders, as well senior staff and the governing body, and are effectively followed up with programmes of professional development. There is a much more obvious team spirit and determination than was described in the last inspection. Aspects identified for improvement in lesson observations form the basis of future discussions and performance management. Success is clear in the growing percentage of lessons where the quality of teaching is good, and occasionally better, and in the much reduced incidence of inadequate teaching. Senior leaders know that there is still work to do to consolidate improvements as far as more-able pupils are concerned. However, focusing on the pace of learning, the use of open-ended questioning, showing pupils how to improve their work through marking, and seeking ways of holding pupils' interest through role play, all underpin the effectiveness of teaching on pupils' progress. Progress rates throughout are now consistent with national expectations, with those in Key Stage 1 making the required six points of improvement, and pupils in Key Stage 2 achieving at least two National Curriculum levels.

Changes being made to Early Years Foundation Stage planning, teaching, assessment and facilities are proving successful in encouraging children to learn actively through structured play opportunities. The positive impact of staff targeting children's communication and social skills was evident in tidy-up time with children happily explaining what they were doing.

Strengths in behaviour, recognised in the last inspection, have been maintained and the impact of provision for those who can, and sometimes do, present problems has been much improved. Good progress in management, and strong links with outside agencies, for example local special schools and social services, have established a system which is proving effective in ensuring that poor behaviour is minimal and that attendance is broadly average. Better curriculum planning has introduced more interesting topic work and involved more use of information and communication technology for research. Being introduced to life as a child during the Second World War and exploring the descriptive poetry of Alfred Noyes are good examples of how teachers are successfully capturing pupils' imagination and encouraging positive attitudes to learning, while extending opportunities for different types of writing.

The vision and ambition of the headteacher, which were recognised in the last inspection as central reasons why the school was given a notice to improve rather than requiring special measures, have been very skillfully communicated to staff. The school's own confidential survey of staff views shows a very strong confidence in the way the school is being led and managed and that all are proud to be working at Orchard Fields. Teachers have embraced the chance to play a part in setting priorities for whole-school development and their action plans show that self-evaluation is not simply the responsibility of senior leaders. There is a collective appreciation that the school is on the right lines and that raising expectations of what pupils are capable of is the way to sustain improvement.

The local authority's statement of action, judged as fit for purpose by Ofsted, is the basis of effective support for the school's leaders and managers. Advice and expertise have been provided in a variety of key areas since the last inspection. This has had the greatest success in helping staff to make better use of assessment to gauge pupils' progress, in encouraging them to participate more constructively in planning to address priorities for improvement, in raising attainment in mathematics, and in supporting developments the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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
Michael Burghart

Additional inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school, so that they meet or exceed the government's current floor standards, by:
 - ensuring consistency in all years in implementing recent improvements in the teaching of reading and writing
 - strengthening teachers' understanding of the interpretation and use of data on pupils' progress.
- Ensure that almost all teaching becomes good or better in the next 12 months, and that any inadequate teaching is eliminated by:
 - extending the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by school leaders, and the provision of suitable professional development
 - further raising expectations of what all pupils can achieve, especially the more able, and ensuring that they are guided to understand clearly how they can improve, both verbally and through marking.
- Build upon recent improvements in leadership so that:
 - senior and middle managers become more experienced and confident in leading staff through the management of change and the drive for consistency in the improvement of the school's performance
 - leaders become increasingly proactive in developing opportunities for strong teamwork with a shared understanding of the school's priorities to set more challenging targets.