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15 November 2012

Mr Paul Burke  
Headteacher  
Mablins Lane Community Primary School  
Mablins Lane  
Crewe  
Cheshire  
CW1 3YR

Dear Mr Burke

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Mablins Lane Community Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 14 November 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also thank the Chair of the Governing Body and the other three governors for their time and comments.

Since the inspection in February 2012, there have been significant changes in staffing and in the structure of the leadership and management of the school. The headteacher's phased return to school ended in mid-April. A deputy headteacher was appointed. She is currently on maternity leave but this inspection coincided with one of her 'keeping in touch' days and she took part in several inspection meetings. The assistant headteacher is acting deputy headteacher. An extended senior leadership team has been formed, including the leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage (a new senior post). Several teachers have left the school and four joined in September, one of whom is newly qualified. Other appointments included a bursar and staff to lead intervention programmes. The number of classes increased in September when the school moved to single age classes.

During the inspection, all of the Year 6 pupils and many pupils in Year 2 were out of school on visits to places of interest. Year 1 pupils were engaged in a number of activities related to Diwali and the Year 4 pupils were taking part in a workshop on Ancient Egypt.

As a result of the inspection on 22 February 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.

The governing body, leaders and staff saw the findings of the inspection in February as a 'wake-up call'. They have worked profitably with the local authority to build on work started



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before the inspection and establish systems and procedures that provide a strong basis for further improvement.

The governing body rightly took a strong line in seeking justification for proposed changes to staffing, class arrangements and the mathematics curriculum, giving close consideration to financial implications as well as to intended improvements in pupils' achievement. Governors take their responsibilities seriously; they are using personal expertise well and giving considerable time and commitment to supporting and working with staff. As a result, they are very well informed about all aspects of the school's performance and question critically the effectiveness of action taken to improve teaching and pupils' progress.

The appointment of new senior managers and the extension of the senior leadership team have been highly beneficial: members referred to being a dynamic team and working constructively together. With clear roles and responsibilities linked to school improvement, the team is playing a significant part in 'keeping the improvement ball rolling' as well as the day-to-day running of the school. The acting deputy headteacher has played a key role in supporting the Reception Year team, in collating and analysing data and in leading teams to develop provision in English and mathematics. The distribution of leadership has enabled the headteacher to give greater attention to strategic matters and to monitoring key areas, including the quality of teaching. He has been well supported by the local authority, a National Leader in Education and the school improvement partner. The school's capacity to bring about improvement has strengthened. Leaders appreciate that there is still work to do to embed procedures and show that their actions are raising pupils' achievement throughout the school, but that there are promising signs of improvement.

The school's results in the 2012 national tests and teacher assessments showed a mixed picture. There were gains at Key Stage 1. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 rose to above average for the first time in five years. In mathematics, one in three pupils went into Year 3 almost a year ahead. Results for Year 6 pupils were slightly higher than in 2011 with 75% of pupils attaining the level for their age in both English and mathematics. However, the school is aware that it only kept pace with a similar rise in national figures and has some way to go to match the national average. In mathematics, the overall standard dipped. Too many pupils did not make the two levels of progress expected during Key Stage 2. Booster sessions and support programmes for Year 6 pupils did not fully offset gaps in previous learning.

A notable success was the improved profile of learning at the end of the Reception Year, particularly in personal, social and emotional development and in mathematics. This means nearly all children have started Year 1 at the level expected for their age: a much more positive picture than in previous years. However, still too many children, particularly the youngest ones, moved into Year 1 not having all the skills needed to link letters and sounds (phonics) and ready to make a secure start in reading and writing. This issue, also evident in previous years, helps to explain the school's lower than average results in the national phonics test for pupils in Year 1.



The rising profile of achievement for the younger children in part reflects the positive impact of changes in ways of working. With guidance from the local authority, staff have reorganised the space to allow children easy access to all activities, made the outdoor space an interesting area for learning and programmed a greater number of adult-led sessions, particularly in number and phonics. During the inspection, children were absorbed in looking at books, and in making marks, having a go at forming letters and writing their names. They counted forwards and backwards, and sorted socks and 'wellies' into pairs. They put them into order of size, comparing and talking about large and small.

The team working to improve achievement in mathematics has identified the need to strengthen pupils' facility with number and pupils' confidence in knowing how to solve mathematical problems. Teachers have put the commercial mathematics scheme to one side and worked together to plan the mathematics curriculum. There is still work to do to identify how pupils may use and apply mathematics in other subjects or class topics. All classrooms now have 'working walls' with key information on current mathematical topics. Lessons observed had an emphasis on investigating aspects of number, money and time. Year 5 pupils moved on well in comparing fractions with some pupils working out the steps to take when the denominators were different and others showing how to compare fractions on a number line. Their explanations showed a developing grasp of equivalence. In all lessons seen, teachers had prepared practical activities, with some led by assistants, as well as interactive whiteboard presentations and differentiated tasks and worksheets to frame pupils' answers. Pupils worked willingly and concentrated well, often helping one another. Chances were missed for teachers to challenge pupils through pace or questioning, to get them to explain their thinking and to reinforce new learning. Pupils' books are neatly presented with attached targets for the term and, for the older pupils, an indication of their level of attainment. The growing use of criteria for success for each new piece of learning is sharpening teachers' mathematical knowledge and fostering pupils' self-assessment. Teachers' marking in mathematics is now helping pupils to improve: pupils were responding to 'pink to think' and to teachers' questions.

The quality of teaching is strengthening. In monitoring it, most emphasis has been placed on generic skills and how well teachers are implementing agreed procedures and points for improvement. Now that these aspects show a good degree of consistency, and increased challenge in the targets for pupils' progress is integral to managing the headteacher's and teachers' performance, there is a need to evaluate more critically the quality of pupils' learning, most especially in mathematics, and the links to effective aspects of teaching.

The local authority's statement of action was fit for purpose. The action plan identified targets, timescales and key intended actions. Both the statement and the action plan have structured the support to date. However, the targets for teaching and pupils' progress in the current action plan are too low given the evidence of improvement from recent data and evaluations.

The school was successful in its bid to the local authority for additional finances to ease the changes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The authority has also invested considerable



resources into strengthening leadership at all levels within the school. The half termly reviews by the local authority have given a critical edge. The second phase of support has begun with coaching for the headteacher and continued support from a National Leader in Education. The input from a mathematics specialist consultant has proved highly effective; staff appreciate her ready guidance, practical ideas and the use of individual surgeries to discuss aspects of teaching.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen  
Her Majesty's Inspector



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012.**

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by: establishing clear roles and responsibilities for school improvement
  - equipping all key leaders and managers with the necessary skills to ensure they are involved fully in driving and monitoring improvements to teaching and pupils' outcomes
  - developing the current monitoring activities so they are rigorous and sharply focused on securing whole-school improvement
  - developing leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, so it is consistently good by:
  - ensuring the mathematics curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils and particularly those in mixed-age classes
  - reviewing how the mathematics scheme of work is used to ensure assessment information is used with greater precision to meet pupils' needs
  - ensuring teachers' marking provides clear guidance so pupils know what they need to improve
  - maximising the use of the outdoor environment in Early Years Foundation Stage.
  
- Raise pupils' achievement, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in mathematics, by:
  - ensuring all pupils are actively involved in their learning
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other areas of the curriculum
  - providing greater opportunities for Reception children to develop their independent, social and language skills.

