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24 January 2013

Mrs A Ballance  
Southwold County Primary School  
Holm Way  
Bicester  
OX26 3UU

Dear Mrs Ballance

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Southwold County Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body, teachers and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the inspector looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work.

### **Context**

Since the inspection the headteacher has implemented changes to the structures and responsibilities for middle managers and teachers through the introduction of literacy and mathematics teams. Since January one teacher has been employed to cover maternity leave. A number of short-term contracts remain in place to cover other maternity leave.

### **Main findings**

Leaders, including governors, have reacted positively to the inspection report. They have reviewed and strengthened the school improvement plan to clearly identify

where planned actions tackle the key priorities reported during the inspection. The plan is detailed and has clear long-term aims related to improving pupils' achievements and the quality of provision. It identifies the right priorities within a realistic timescale of improvement. The school has produced comprehensive targets for pupil progress in each age group. However, these are not included as part of the improvement plan to be used as key milestones to check that the school is on track to become a good school. Monitoring and evaluation times are identified throughout the plan but they do not focus explicitly enough on each specific activity. There is no overview of monitoring activities to help staff and governors understand when they will occur and how they relate to new initiatives and how well they are embedded in all classes.

Actions started prior to the inspection are starting to have an impact on raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Procedures to assess, monitor pupils' progress over time and set realistic targets have been improved. As a result staff are starting to be held to account more rigorously for the progress pupils make in their class. Teachers have a better understanding of how their collective work supports pupils' progress over time. Staff are positive about the changes that started last year and these have accelerated since the inspection. They feel more involved in decisions about the school's work and its future aims. As one teacher said, 'we have seen the success of changes and we all know where we are going'.

Good emphasis has been given to improving the quality of teaching through whole school training and by providing teachers with increased opportunities to observe, identify and share effective practice. They recognise that the sharing of ideas is starting to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers are particularly enthusiastic about the training they have received about good practice in teaching phonics (letters and the sounds they make) through the 'Read, Write Inc' programme and the subsequent time allocated each day to develop pupils' phonics skills. They indicate that the increased amount of resources is helping them to plan more interesting and active lessons.

Governors demonstrate an improved understanding of how to use assessment and progress data to hold the school, particularly the headteacher, to account for pupils' achievement. Since the inspection they have undertaken training with a local authority representative on how to interrogate data and compare the school's position more robustly to national and local authority data. They have also revised the monitoring policy in order to develop a more consistent understanding and approach to their monitoring role. They understand the need to monitor the impact of additional government funding, through the pupil premium, on targeted pupils' outcomes.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure that work focuses on the key priorities and involves staff more in setting the direction of improvements and key milestones for progress through the literacy and mathematics teams
- include the pupil progress targets in the school improvement plan as key milestones so that they can be used to hold staff to account and also to check that everything is on track
- write an overview of monitoring and evaluation activities so that staff and governors have a clearer view of when activities will take place and their specific focus
- ensure governors are more involved in the programme of monitoring and evaluation activities
- send a copy of the revised improvement plans to the inspector.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided a broad range of support including brokering a link with another school judged to be outstanding, which started just before the inspection. Effective support from the partner school has included moderation of lesson observations and the identification of key priorities. Joint work between teachers and middle managers from both schools is starting to improve the quality of teaching and the roles and responsibilities of middle managers at Southwold. Local authority officers are providing effective support for the headteacher in evaluating the school's work and through the delivery of targeted training for staff working in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are also providing helpful development for school governors.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**