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Ms L Regan
Headteacher
Hillocks Primary and Nursery School
Unwin Road
Sutton-in-Ashfield
NG17 4ND

Dear Ms Regan

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Hillocks Primary and Nursery School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 24 January 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, the reading programme adviser, the mathematics consultant, the local authority's education improvement adviser, and the headteacher and advanced skills teacher from the partnership school.

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the school and the literacy leader is currently taking maternity leave. The classes of these teachers are currently taught by temporary contract teachers. The terms of office of three parent governors ended and three new governors have been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 10 July 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.

The acceleration of pupils' progress noted at the last inspection continues. The progress of disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who benefit from pupil premium funding is getting faster and many of these pupils are now achieving well. These improvements are due to better teaching, additional provision in mathematics, especially for girls, and more closely tailored support for lower attaining pupils.

The school's monitoring information shows that the good progress made by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been maintained. Pupils' progress continues to be slower in Key Stages 1 and 2 because inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are preventing pupils' progress accelerating more rapidly. Although pupils' attainment throughout the school in reading, writing and mathematics is rising, it remains below average.

Pupils' mathematical calculation skills are improving, mainly because all teachers now regularly and systematically teach these skills. Support from an external consultant is helping teachers use resources more effectively to promote pupils' mathematical understanding. The after-school 'girls only' mathematics clubs are improving the skills and confidence of girls to perform mathematical calculations and solve problems. As a result, the previous wide gap between girls' attainment in mathematics and the national average is closing. New initiatives to improve the achievement of the lower attaining pupils in literacy are having a marked impact on improving pupils' skills. A programme of learning, led by trained teaching assistants and matched well to pupils' level of skills and knowledge, is helping pupils make rapid improvements in their spelling and reading.

Links with a local partnership school and training from the school's leaders are improving teaching. Teachers from both schools willingly take opportunities to see each other teach and share ideas about good teaching practice. As a result, work given to pupils in lessons is now more closely matched to their abilities and pupils are led more effectively through small learning steps. However, these aspects of good teaching are still inconsistent and this is the main reason why teaching still requires improvement.

The marking policy has been revised and the quality of marking has improved greatly. Teachers now provide pupils with clear advice on how to improve their work. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to respond to the marking, correct errors and show that they have learnt from their mistakes. Most pupils know their targets for improvement, especially those related to writing and mathematical calculation. They are less clear about their reading targets. All teachers provide opportunities for pupils to improve the quality of their writing through lessons other than literacy. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills outside of the numeracy lessons. In some classes, the presentation of pupils' work is untidy.

The governing body has attended local authority training on how to understand and use the school's assessment information to check on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Similar training is planned for the three new governors. The Chair of the Governing Body has worked with the school's leaders to extend his knowledge and understanding even further so that he can provide greater challenge to the school's leaders. School leaders have rewritten their plans for improvement. These now include information on who will check each improvement action, and how and when these actions will occur. However, the plans do not have any measurable short-term

pupils' progress targets. As a result, senior leaders and the governing body have no way of checking if the actions of the plan are having an impact on raising pupils' achievement.

Targeted support for identified families with low attendance, regular reminders to parents and carers, and 'Snappy and Croc', the two characters who hand out prize raffle tickets to pupils who arrive on time, are among the many initiatives introduced to encourage pupils to attend regularly and arrive punctually. Although the school can show evidence that previously low attenders are now coming to school more often, widespread illness last term means that attendance since the start of the school year has not shown an increase from last year.

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements and is fit for purpose. The school's leaders and the governing body greatly appreciate the support given to the school through advice from the school's local authority's education improvement adviser, training for the governing body and links with a local partnership school. This support has contributed significantly to the progress made since the last inspection.

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

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that at least 75% is good or better in order to raise pupils' achievement, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2, by:
 - ensuring that the teaching meets the needs of underachieving groups of pupils, particularly girls in mathematics in Key Stage 2
 - promoting consistency in teachers' expectations and methods in teaching mathematics, including by revising and improving the policy for teaching calculation
 - improving assessment in lessons to ensure that teachers consistently plan work that is accurately matched to pupils' abilities
 - improving the quality of marking and target-setting so pupils understand the next steps of learning they need to take to improve.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by February 2013, by:
 - ensuring that there are more frequent opportunities for pupils to develop writing and mathematical skills in different subjects
 - improving the rigour of leaders' monitoring of school improvement by ensuring that all action plans clearly state who will check each action, and now and when it will be done

- Improve attendance so that it is at least average by July 2013, by continuing to work with other agencies and the parents and carers of those who have a high rate of absence.