26 April 2013

Pauline Duncombe
Maple Tree Lower School
Hawk Drive
Sandy
SG19 2WA

Dear Ms Duncombe

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Maple Tree Lower School, Sandy.

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 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 February 2013.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with yourself and the local authority school intervention manager. I met five representatives of the governing body. I evaluated the school improvement plan and looked at data on pupils' progress. I scrutinised a sample of your lesson observation summaries. We jointly carried out visits to classes, looked at exercise books and spoke to pupils about their work.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the previous inspection.

Main findings

School leaders are not yet demonstrating the urgent need for improvement to become a good school. Arrangements are in place to review pupils' progress. Marking is improving and teachers are trying hard to match the work to the needs of their pupils. However, this is not yet consistent. Your feedback to staff following lesson observations is not sufficiently precise to improve teaching to good and from

good to outstanding. For example, feedback notes identify that the pace in some lessons is too slow, but development points to teachers lack detail. This makes holding teachers to account from one lesson to the next less robust. Work to improve literacy skills is slow to start. There is insufficient use of coaching and working alongside teachers to model outstanding practice.

Work is progressing to raise standards in mathematics. Staff are analysing levels of pupils' work and are visiting good and outstanding schools to observe effective practice in problem solving skills.

Governors are highly committed and have a good knowledge of the school. With the support of your school improvement professional (SIP) you and your senior team have constructed a useful improvement plan. Governors, however, were not sufficiently involved in this work from the outset. Consequently, they are still concentrating on refining and understanding the plan rather than checking that the actions identified are actually making a difference.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- specify the targets for outstanding teaching and for the proportion of pupils exceeding expected progress
- ensure that the governors have accurate information and data to check progress made on the improvement plan
- ensure that lessons learnt from all professional development activities, including lesson observations, are quickly put into practice
- make better use of Ofsted's publications to learn from the best schools.

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

External support

Before the inspection, the local authority had a more positive view of the quality of teaching and learning than that identified by inspectors. The local authority has now increased the support to your school, but it is too early to see whether this is making a difference.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector