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1 October 2013

Mrs Jo Walker  
Headteacher  
Merdon Junior School  
Merdon Avenue  
Eastleigh  
SO53 1EJ

Dear Mrs Walker

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Merdon Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 30 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- check that the pace of change outlined in the action plan is achievable, and includes time to revisit and consolidate actions if necessary, as well as allocated time for subject leaders to develop their subjects
- make sure all teachers explain to pupils what they are learning in clear and simple language so they know what is expected of them
- improve the consistency of teaching so that all staff use questioning and practical resources equally well to support learning
- continue to develop links with good and outstanding schools to benefit from good practice.

## **Evidence**

During the visit I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan. I visited each classroom to see the school at work and spoke to pupils and looked at the work in books.

## **Context**

Since the inspection in June 2013 two teachers have left the school. One newly qualified teacher and one experienced teacher have been appointed and a long term supply teacher is currently in post to cover a long term illness.

## **Main findings**

You have worked hard since the inspection in June to ensure that no momentum was lost when the school no longer required special measures. You are very focused and clear about what needs to be done to improve the school and are building a strong staff team who are also determined that the school will be judged 'good' as soon as possible.

There were some staff changes at the end of the summer term and you managed these carefully to ensure the best for the pupils. This means that pupils have had as little disruption to their learning as possible. You have rightly decided that the deputy headteacher should teach a class for part of her week. This is helpful because she is keeping her teaching skills up to date as well as reporting back to you how well new initiatives are working in the classroom.

The school's single plan for improvement sets out clearly and in detail the developments you wish to put in place. The pace of change is too fast and the plan does not allow sufficient time to embed and revisit initiatives. Subject leaders for English and mathematics have good ideas and are keen to support you in making improvements. They have not had enough opportunity to check for themselves exactly what needs to be done in their subject and write their own action plans. There is not enough time in the plan for them to communicate their ideas to staff and check to see how well these have been put in place.

Teachers are beginning to develop classroom environments better to support pupils in lessons. For example, pupils in one class were effectively using information about sentence openers displayed on the 'working wall' to support their writing. You are right to encourage staff to celebrate pupils' achievements so that pupils are enthused. The display of writing about King Rufus is a good example of how work on display can encourage pupils to aspire to do their best.

Pupils spoke positively about changes to the teaching of mathematics, where staff are making an effort to bring lessons to life. However they reported that in other

lessons teachers sometimes talk for too long. I know this is an area you are aware of and are working to improve. In addition some pupils said they get confused when teachers do not explain in simple enough language what they are learning. This is holding them back.

As you know, there is some strong teaching in the school. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson we saw pupils very focused on their learning and challenged well by questioning which made them think hard. This is a helpful model of good practice. Where you have coached and supported teachers you have made a positive impact. For example we saw a lesson where practical resources were used effectively to help pupils with their mathematics. Your work with staff needs to ensure all teaching is as successful as these examples.

Recent changes to how homework is set are helpful. It is now clearer what pupils are expected to do and they are encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning. These changes are at an early stage but feedback from parent governors is positive because they say work is now more personalised for each child.

The governors are working more effectively to support and challenge the school because they have reorganised themselves into a single team rather than several committees. This means that while the school is striving to be 'good' all governors understand all the issues the school is working on. They are acting cohesively to drive improvements. They have a good understanding of their responsibility to ask the right questions and hold senior leaders to account. However, they need further training to do this effectively and you have taken the right steps to organise this for them.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided good support for the headteacher to decide on key priorities. An appropriate amount of advisers' time is allocated to the school and support is tailored well to the school's needs. Links with other schools are proving beneficial, for example in providing links for sport and support for more able writers. However, they should be developed further to accelerate improvements in teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**