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9 November 2013

Mrs S Thornton  
Headteacher  
Siskin Infant and Nursery School  
Nimrod Drive  
Rowner  
Gosport  
PO13 8AA

Dear Mrs Thornton

**Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Siskin Infant and Nursery School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weakness designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Marcia Headon  
**Additional Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013**

- Eliminate inadequate teaching and improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good by:
  - making sure teachers make better use of what they know about what pupils can already do when planning work, so that it is at the right level for all pupils, especially the most able
  - making sure that all staff, including learning support assistants, use questions that challenge pupils and extend their understanding
  - improving the consistency and quality of marking and target setting so that pupils are clearer about the next steps in their learning and what they need to do to improve
  - making sure the pace of learning remains high throughout lessons.
  
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - ensuring that staff provide activities for children to choose that excite their curiosity, and interact with the children to help them learn effectively
  - providing a learning environment that is rich in language and number in order to capture children's interest and extend their knowledge and understanding.
  
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing by ensuring that the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and handwriting are systematically taught.
  
- Ensure leaders and managers across the federation embed and extend new initiatives by ensuring that they are consistently applied, in order to continue to accelerate the pace of change.
  
- Make sure governors have a clear understanding of how well pupils in the infant school are doing to help them hold the school to account for pupils' achievement.
  
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 November 2013**

### **Evidence**

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders, and three representatives from the governing body, and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. She discussed the school's improvement planning, viewed the school's latest self-evaluation document, considered a wide variety of documentary evidence of actions taken by the school to promote improvement and analysed the achievement information from across the school. She also looked at the books of the pupils' work. The inspector, accompanied by the headteacher, observed teaching in all year groups.

### **Context**

Since the first monitoring visit in May 2013 there have been a number of staffing changes. A new Early Years Foundation Stage leader has been appointed and a learning support assistant leader who works closely with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). The external building works have been completed. Extensive remodelling has taken place within the reception and nursery areas. The executive headteacher is leaving at Christmas. Until a permanent appointment is made an experienced headteacher from another school will take up the post for three days a week.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The executive headteacher has continued her tenacious drive for improvement and has been relentless in insisting that the new systems and structures introduced are all focused on improving the learning for the pupils. Working with the staff and governors, the headteacher has developed a very clear vision for the school. There is now a strong sense of direction and a calm and purposeful atmosphere.

The school improvement plan has been reviewed regularly with staff and modified appropriately where necessary. The evaluation of its effectiveness is based on strong tangible evidence. All staff have drawn up their own individual action plans based on the school development plan, including the learning support assistants. As a result, staff act consistently and there is a strong focus on continuous improvement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous.

The senior leadership team has provided strong support for the executive headteacher and together they have monitored the work of the school very closely. They have an accurate view of the progress made and of the areas which still require attention. Any underperformance is being tackled robustly. They have restructured the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure that it meets the needs of the pupils in the locality more precisely, many of whom enter the school with little experience of any formal pre-schooling. There is now a much

greater emphasis upon developing children's learning through well-structured activities and play both indoors and outdoors. The school has continued to develop its links with external providers who support play therapy and work with families.

Systems to check pupils' learning have been revised and the school now has a much better understanding of the progress which pupils are making. Systems for collecting information are robust and the tracking of pupils' progress is regular and accurate. The deputy headteacher manages these systems very effectively.

Pupils' progress is improving as a result of better teaching. In 2013 the percentage of children in Year 1 who did well in the national phonics screening test rose considerably and in Year 2, of those children who retook the test, a higher proportion than nationally achieved the expected standard. In Year 2, although results in reading were still below the national average, there was a significant improvement with some children reaching the higher level for the first time in this school. Pupils' results in writing and mathematics were not at national average levels, but pupils had made good progress when their starting points were considered. The school's tracking shows the rapid progress which children have continued to make in the first half of the autumn term 2013 in reading, writing and mathematics.

Middle and senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely. The leaders for English and mathematics work with the headteacher half-termly to observe lessons, look at pupils' work and ensure teachers' judgements are accurate. This means they have a good understanding of the impact resulting from the improvements in teaching. Marking is now very thorough. Teachers give pupils helpful advice on how to improve their work through the use of 'two stars and a wish' written at the end of work. This advice is followed up in lessons.

The same governing body serves the federation of both infant and junior schools. It now has a much greater understanding of the work of the infant school and is holding senior leaders to account more tightly. The governors have taken their own development very seriously and as well as an external review of governance, which was positive, have undertaken training in understanding data information and in how to monitor and evaluate the infant school's progress more effectively. They are aware of the challenges ahead with the change of executive headteacher, but are determined to ensure progress continues to be made.

The school has made enough progress for the likely removal of the serious weakness designation. I am recommending that the next inspection be a full section 5 inspection.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- There is a consistent focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staff have responded well to the higher expectations demanded of them and through coaching and mentoring and their own enthusiasm and commitment their teaching has improved. All lessons observed during the visit were at least good, and some outstanding teaching was observed in both Year 1 and Year 2.
- The regular weekly meetings for staff are used effectively to plan the work for pupils across the school. This ensures that children's intended progress is analysed and work is well matched to the need of the pupils.
- The introduction of the International Primary Curriculum has engaged the pupils' interest and made learning much more vibrant. It provides vital opportunities for children to be able to practise their writing skills. The emphasis on letter formation and writing is having a positive impact on progress in literacy.
- The use of a new phonics (the sounds letters and combinations of letters make) scheme has improved pupils' reading and spelling. All pupils now expect to work on this first thing in the day. The school constantly reviews pupils' progress and moves pupils into a higher group once they are able to show they have mastered the work in that group.
- The strong links with the junior school in the federation have enabled staff to be deployed very flexibly to help their own development. A member of staff from the junior school is now working very effectively in Year 2 and staff from the infant and junior schools visit one another's classrooms, which aids their understanding of progression between the two.
- The nursery and reception classroom areas have been re-equipped. Pupils now use a wide variety of resources which are more appropriate and there is emphasis at a much earlier age on encouraging letter recognition and reading and writing.
- The very early and rigorous focus on identifying need and providing additional support for pupils with special educational needs has meant that pupils receive very good support in their learning. The SENCo uses a very wide range of help from outside the school to help support and improve pupils' learning.
- The importance placed on regular attendance means that figures show it is now near national averages. The appointment of the home school worker who supports families has had a considerable impact as has the governors' revised policy of refusing all holidays in school time.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Although there has been considerable improvement in the support which learning support assistants give to teachers and pupils, a few longstanding assistants are still not fully engaged with the children's' learning. The school is addressing this issue.

## **External support**

The local authority has continued to provide good support to the school. It has checked its progress regularly. Advisers for literacy and numeracy and early years have worked alongside staff, coaching and mentoring them and helping to improve the quality of teaching. It has provided helpful advice to the governing body, including the appointment of two additional governors to support the work in the infant school.