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Lisa Clayton
Headteacher
Oughton Primary and Nursery School
Mattocke Road
Hitchin
SG5 2NZ

Dear Mrs Clayton

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Oughton Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 January 2014. 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 weaknesses 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 Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to good by making sure that:
 - teachers show that their expectations of what pupils can achieve are high in all classes
 - the tasks set in lessons are stimulating and interesting, and demanding but achievable for pupils
 - explanations, questioning and discussion are used effectively to ensure that pupils fully understand new work.

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment by Year 6, especially in mathematics, by:
 - spreading the best practice in the teaching of mathematics
 - extending opportunities for practical problem solving in mathematics
 - encouraging pupils to write longer pieces of work in subjects such as history and geography
 - making sure that pupils practise their numeracy skills in different subjects.

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders, including governors:
 - have the skills, information and time necessary to fulfil their roles
 - are fully involved in checking the impact of new initiatives and approaches on 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 13 November 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher five members of the governing body, leaders of mathematics reading and writing and a representative of the local authority. The inspector visited classrooms with the headteacher to observe teaching and learning. She talked informally to pupils and looked at the work in their books. The inspector also looked at records of monitoring activities and information about the progress pupils make and their attainment. The inspector scrutinised the record of safeguarding checks carried out on teachers and other staff.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection two teachers have left the school and been replaced. One teaching assistant has left the school and two joined it in September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the pace of improvement has quickened. School leaders and governors are determined to improve the school's effectiveness and understand that progress for all pupils must accelerate. Leaders are addressing weak teaching and pupils are much more focused in lessons because activities more closely meet their needs.

The senior leadership team monitors the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously. They visit lessons more frequently and planning and pupils' books are scrutinized carefully. Leaders give teachers more helpful feedback about how to improve elements of their teaching. Leaders share information with each other well and ensure that areas for improvement are followed up quickly to ensure that they have been addressed. Sometimes, however, the feedback teachers receive is too concerned with specific elements of lessons that require improvement and do not focus well enough on the progress that groups of pupils make in their lessons and over time. School leaders ensure that teachers have the training they need to improve. This sometimes comes from within the school. Where appropriate the school draws on support and training from a linked school or from the local authority.

Although the presentation of work still varies too much, pupils' books show that many of them are making better progress. These improvements are too recent however, to have had any significant impact on the most recent achievement data. Pupils' outcomes in the summer 2014 assessments at the end of Year 6 did not improve significantly. Not enough pupils make the expected progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in developing their reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Teachers are held to account for the progress of pupils in regular meetings with senior leaders. During these meetings, leaders and teachers consider how best to support pupils and help them catch up if they have fallen behind. Despite this increased scrutiny and accountability, staff are positive about the journey the school is making and they are supportive of the headteacher and determined to do their part.

Leaders have set higher expectations for pupils' work, for instance in the amount of writing pupils are expected to complete in lessons. Marking is now more consistently helpful in showing pupils how they can improve their work. Reading, writing and mathematics leaders have an accurate view of what needs to improve. They have carefully analysed the results of teachers' assessments. This has helped them understand where there have been gaps in teaching and learning. For instance, additional mathematics lessons have been introduced which aim to address weaknesses in basic skills, such as learning the times tables. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length so that they can practise their skills. Weekly spelling and grammar lessons have been introduced to address the main weaknesses in pupils' writing.

Governors are asking more challenging questions of the school and the data they receive. They are supporting of school leaders and have allocated additional resources to help improve the progress of the oldest pupils by employing an additional teacher in Year 6. The Chair of the Governing Body visits the school very regularly and other governors have a good understanding of what the school is doing to improve achievement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is clarity of vision among all leaders at the school and all staff are determined to make a difference.
- There is now much more regular and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Weaker teaching is being addressed with urgency and teachers receive training to help them improve.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school did not respond quickly the section 5 inspection as fast as it should have done and the progress of pupils over the last academic year did not improve quickly enough.
- Some of the feedback to teachers following monitoring activities does not focus well enough on the progress pupils make in lessons and overtime.

External support

The local authority monitors the school closely through regular visits and action group meetings. These meetings also serve to model to governors how their questions can hold the school to account.

The local authority provides valuable support to improve leadership and teaching, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school also draws on support from the linked school to improve teaching by encouraging teachers to observe examples of good practice.