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5 March 2015

Ms Helen Shead  
Headteacher  
Lancot School  
Lancot Drive  
Dunstable  
Bedfordshire  
LU6 2AP

Dear Ms Shead

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Lancot School**

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 2015 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 September 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 Central Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014**

- Make sure teaching promotes good learning and progress for all groups of pupils in each lesson by ensuring teachers:
  - understand the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should acquire in each subject
  - keep a close eye on how pupils respond to learning activities and adapt these if pupils are not making the progress they should
  - provide clear explanations to pupils about what they are learning
  - are more ambitious about what all pupils can achieve, especially higher ability pupils, and plan learning activities accordingly
  - explain to teaching assistants precisely how to help pupils with their learning
  - explain precisely what pupils should do to improve their work and give them enough time to make these improvements
  - model good handwriting and show pupils how to record their work neatly and carefully in their exercise books and check that this is done.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by improving teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts and curriculum content.
- Improve leadership and management of provision for pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs by making sure all staff know and understand what these needs are and precisely how to help pupils make the best possible progress in lessons.
- Improve children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensuring that teachers and early years support staff help children learn well when they are choosing their own activities by:
  - asking questions that help children think about and explain their ideas
  - observing children exploring different activities so they know precisely when to intervene with new ideas or questions to extend learning
  - having meaningful and sustained conversations with children as they play, to develop their vocabulary and understanding of concepts.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by making sure:
  - teaching improves rapidly
  - senior leaders and governors keep a vigilant eye on pupils' learning and progress and take immediate action if this is not good enough
  - all leaders have enough time to carry out their additional responsibilities effectively.

### **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 March 2015**

## **Evidence**

The monitoring inspection focused on the progress made in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in September 2014.

The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader, the mathematics leader, the local authority adviser and three members of the governing body, including the chair. She visited all classes together with leaders, looked at pupils' books and spoke to some about their work and the changes being made.

## **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, one teacher and one senior leader have left the school. Two new assistant headteachers have been appointed. One will start after the Easter break and lead the improvement of standards, and the other will start in September and lead on inclusion. Plans are in place for the school to become a sponsored academy later in the year.

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

Leaders have rewritten the school priorities plan. This is now a more sharply focused tool with clear dates and indicators against which improvement will be measured. It incorporates planned staff training and some of the agreed actions for the external advisers and consultants working with staff. This means that the majority of improvement work is better directed at key priorities. As well as these positive developments, leaders are addressing the nationally required changes to the curriculum and are implementing new strategies for assessing pupils' progress and attainment. With local authority support, and through work with other schools, leaders are working well to ensure this new assessment is accurate.

A thorough programme of training and monitoring is enabling teaching and support staff to improve the quality of their work. While improvements in teaching are helping pupils to achieve better standards in Key Stage 1, the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 remains too variable to support good achievement. This is partly because of continuing changes in staffing brought about by the increased challenge and higher expectations.

Pupils' achievement remains variable too. Assessment information suggests that more children in the Reception class are on track to achieve a good level of development than in previous years. It also suggests that a similar proportion of pupils in Key Stage 1 are on track to match the above-average attainment in reading that was seen in 2014. However, fewer pupils than nationally are currently on track to reach higher levels in writing and particularly in mathematics. In some year groups in Key Stage 2, previous staff turbulence and poor quality teaching mean

that pupils need to make significantly accelerated progress to catch up with age-related attainment expectations. Where teaching is improving strongly this is happening. However, because there are still instances of teaching needing to improve, rising standards are not evident in all year groups.

The members of the governing body have welcomed the improved analysis of the impact of leaders' work they receive through meetings of the monitoring board. This is enabling them to sharpen their questioning and to hold leaders to account against the measures identified in the priorities plan. Although governors are involved in deciding how the pupil premium (extra government funding to support disadvantaged pupils) is spent, they are only just starting to fully understand whether the use of it is making a significant enough difference in improving pupils' achievement.

The governors have supported the improvement drive by agreeing the financing of the early appointment of the assistant headteacher responsible for standards.

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

- The deputy headteacher's work in improving the quality of teaching and learning is of a very high standard. Her leadership is both rigorous and effective. The staff she works with receive well-targeted challenge, training and support for whole-school improvement priorities and for bespoke areas of their work. The systems she is implementing for teachers to observe each other, and so improve the quality of teaching, are building a stronger and more professional learning community.
- The headteacher and class teachers review pupils' progress every half term. Teachers' ability to use assessment information to identify pupils at risk of underachievement has strengthened. The actions needed to support improved progress are identified at these meetings and their success is monitored. As a result, leaders have a better understanding of the extent to which teachers are successful in their work to make sure all pupils succeed well.
- Governors have supported leaders to advertise nationally in order to recruit staff with the skills necessary to drive improvement. This is a significant investment recognising the importance of securing strong leadership to effectively drive the necessary changes.
- Senior leaders are supporting other leaders to develop the skills necessary to lead their areas of responsibility effectively. While this work is ongoing, and more direction is required, new leaders are rising to the challenge and are starting to improve the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility.
- Behaviour was good in all of the lessons visited. Staff make their expectations clear to pupils in assemblies and through the strategies teachers use. Pupils engaged positively in their learning and demonstrated good understanding of

the higher standards expected in their work. In some classes, where teaching is stronger, they explained how their teachers' marking is helping them to understand how to improve their work more rapidly.

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

- The headteacher has been managing the responsibilities for safeguarding and special educational needs, and so the time available for her to actively support developing leaders has been limited. As a result, priorities identified by external advisers and through leaders' own monitoring have not been addressed sufficiently rigorously or rapidly. This is particularly the case with regard to the improvements required in the early years.
- Governors' monitoring activities and responsibilities are not identified in the priorities plan. As a result, their ability to independently evaluate the impact of the actions being taken to bring about improvement has been limited.
- The majority of teachers are improving their practice. However, there are still too many instances where agreed policies and expectations, for example those relating to marking, are not used effectively by all. As a result, the pace of improvement is hindered and some pupils are not making the progress they should.

### **External support**

Relationships between school leaders and the local authority have improved. The adviser allocated to the school has given good, well-received support for improvement planning, aligning the local authority statement of action with the school priorities plan to sharpen the impact of actions. Advisers have provided guidance on how to improve provision in the early years and the leadership and quality of teaching in mathematics. In some instances the response to this advice has not been swift enough. The local authority adviser chairs the governing body monitoring group. There has been some lack of understanding about how her role should ensure leaders are challenged to demonstrate improvement in these meetings. This is, however, now better understood.

The local authority has arranged support from a Central Bedfordshire leader of education. Their guidance has helped to ensure that assessment information is accurate, and they have provided training for support staff. It is not yet clear how effectively senior leaders are using and building on this work to ensure further improvement. Support to enhance governance has also been commissioned from a national leader. However, the governors say that they did not find the initial approaches to questioning modelled in their meeting useful in developing their own practice.

To ensure the school continues to improve, the following action should be taken:

- Reallocate the extra responsibilities currently undertaken by the headteacher so that her work can be better targeted on responding quickly to feedback from other leaders and advisers regarding the most important improvement priorities.
- Make sure that governors' monitoring activities enable them to independently evaluate the impact of actions being taken by leaders to bring about improvement.