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7 May 2015

Mr J Stanford  
Headteacher  
Poulner Junior School  
North Poulner Road  
Ringwood  
Hampshire  
BH24 3LA

Dear Mr Stanford

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

Following my visit to your school on 6 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- analyse pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics, by year and class to identify exactly where pupils' progress needs to accelerate and set suitably challenging, differentiated targets for the end each term up to July 2016
- set termly targets to narrow the gap between disadvantaged pupils and the other pupils in each year, in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the school's plan for improvement, by:
  - setting ambitious targets for pupils' progress based on knowledge of what needs to be achieved in each subject and year group
  - including specific actions to show how disadvantaged pupils' attainment will be raised

- making sure all actions are specific, clear and targeted precisely on what needs to improve
  - setting out precisely how senior leaders' skills in evaluating teaching, learning and achievement will be improved
  - include dates and milestones to show when actions will be started and completed, when the plan will be monitored and evaluated, who will do this and how.
- submit the revised plan to Her Majesty's Inspector by 22 May 2015

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, inclusion leader, governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's plan for improvement was evaluated. Her Majesty's Inspector visited four lessons with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to review a sample of writing books. The inspector reviewed the most recent data on pupils' achievement and senior leaders' records from their monitoring of teaching.

## **Main findings**

Since the section 5 inspection, governors have acted decisively to strengthen governance. The Chair of Governors wasted no time in setting up the required review of governance, which was carried out by the local authority's governor services team. Governors have already started to respond to the review's recommendations. The committee structure has been revised along with terms of reference. Governors' visits now have a more specific focus, typically linked to one of the school's priorities for improvement, with follow-up actions agreed and recorded. A new strategic action group has been formed to keep in touch with, and help drive, the school's improvement. Each member is linked to a key area for improvement, from the inspection report. This is appropriate.

The inclusion leader has tightened up the procedures for monitoring the progress of disadvantaged pupils. These pupils' progress is now reviewed regularly, on an individual basis, and steps are taken to adapt any extra help if it is not proving successful. The inclusion leader is developing an in-depth knowledge of these pupils' learning and progress, term by term. This applies to the more able pupils as well as those working at below average levels. The school's assessments show disadvantaged pupils are starting to do better in many cases but it is still early days; more time is needed for the new procedures to show impact.

Disadvantaged pupils' attainment needs to rise. The inspection report commented on the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and the other pupils reducing quickly. This is indeed the case for Year 6 pupils in writing and, particularly, mathematics where the school's assessments show the gap has closed. However, in reading, it has widened considerably compared to last year's gap in Year 6. Gaps in other year groups are

too wide in all three areas. In Year 5, for example, disadvantaged pupils, on average, are almost a year behind the others; in Years 3 and 4, they are over a year behind. Gaps are far too wide in reading in Years 3, 4 and 6, mathematics in Year 4, and writing and mathematics in Year 3.

Senior leaders have not brought the stark differences, between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and those from more favourable backgrounds, into sharp focus. The school's plan improvement does not include narrowing the gap for disadvantaged pupils as one of its priorities yet the wide gaps are a clear barrier to the school being judged good.

The school's plan for improvement has other shortcomings. Senior leaders' targets are unambitious and far adrift from those that would be typical in a school aiming to move from requiring improvement to good. The targets for the proportion of pupils who will make expected progress by July 2015 are far too low. They are below the school's Year 6 results last year and below the government's minimum expectations for pupils' progress. The targets for the proportion who will make good progress in reading and mathematics are also too low, being below those achieved by the pupils who left last year and those achieved nationally at Year 6.

Leaders have not analysed in depth to find out, specifically, where the barriers lie in pupils' attainment and progress. The plan does not therefore show precisely where leaders' and teachers' efforts need to be focused, based on a detailed knowledge of pupils' progress in every subject, year group and class. It therefore lacks specific, differentiated targets so that leaders and governors can check that planned actions are working and that pupils' progress is accelerating where it needs to.

The timelines for each action in the plan are vague. It would be difficult for anyone monitoring the plan to know whether actions are being carried out in a timely way, whether there is slippage and when they can expect actions to be completed and showing success.

The arrangements for monitoring the success of the actions are unclear. They do not indicate who will monitor the implementation of the plan, how they will do it and when. In many cases, the leaders who are monitoring actions are the same people who are taking responsibility for leading them. This is not good practice as those given the responsibility to monitor the actions need to have a 'fresh eye' and be able to evaluate the impact of actions objectively.

The plan does not specify how senior and middle leaders' skills in evaluating pupils' learning and achievement will be improved. The weaknesses outlined above, relating to the way targets are set, illustrate how important it is for leaders to evaluate pupils' achievement, in depth, and to set clear priorities for improvement. Records of senior leaders' lesson observations and, particularly, 'learning walks' show minimal consideration of pupils' learning. There is too much emphasis on what the teacher is doing and too little on pupils' learning at different points during the observation. The

form used for 'learning walks' amounts to little more than a tick list. As a result, the records do not provide secure enough evidence to support leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have been focusing on improving writing over the last half term. Since mid-February, all teachers have been asked to ensure their pupils complete an extended piece of writing on a weekly basis. In addition, the deputy headteacher is leading a coaching programme for teachers, part of which focuses on different strategies for improving pupils' learning. There was limited evidence, from the writing books sampled, that pupils' progress is improving as a result of these initiatives. Examples of effective marking were seen, contrasted by less helpful marking in other cases. More able pupils' books showed little evidence of pupils being given more opportunities to write at length over recent months even though their most recent writing assessments showed they were highly capable of this. Pupils' books included more examples of grammar, punctuation and spelling tasks – another area the school was asked to improve. However, these were often too easy for the more able pupils.

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

### **External support**

The local authority has facilitated links with another school that has moved successfully from requiring improvement to good. Senior leaders have visited the good school but the support is still at a very early stage and the impact is not yet evident. The local authority acted quickly to set up a review of governance, which involved not only looking at governors' minutes and paperwork but also meeting with governors to evaluate their effectiveness. The report stemming from the review has provided a helpful steer for governors, who have moved forward quickly to strengthen their strategic role. The local authority representative had not seen the completed version of the school's improvement plan prior to the monitoring inspection. Although not recommended at the inspection, the local authority have decided to conduct a review of the pupil premium funding. Given the need to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, this is entirely appropriate.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**