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Miss Karen Wallace
Headteacher
King's Ford Junior School
Gloucester Avenue
Shrub End
Colchester
CO2 9AZ

Dear Miss Wallace

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of King's Ford Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 June 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in March 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 Essex.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that pupils develop better writing skills and cover the full range of mathematics required
 - ensuring that pupils present their work neatly, using well-formed handwriting and accurate spelling
 - ensuring that younger pupils can use letter sounds confidently in order to improve their writing and spelling.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing governors with straightforward assessment information so that they can compare pupils' achievement with the national picture
 - providing guidance on what is to be taught in each subject, and monitoring the curriculum more effectively
 - providing training to raise teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of work pupils should produce in each subject
 - taking steps to improve occasional incidents of misbehaviour on the playground.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, two members of the governing body, and the English and mathematics subject leaders. She spoke to parents as they brought their children to school and to a local authority adviser by phone. She heard pupils from Years 3 and 6 read and spoke to them about their reading and about behaviour. The inspector analysed assessment information, scrutinised improvement plans, documents relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning and safeguarding information, and looked at a range of pupils' work from all year groups. Together with the headteacher, the inspector visited all classes, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work.

Context

Since the inspector's last visit, a Year 6 teacher has taken long-term ill-health leave and the headteacher and deputy headteacher have continued to teach Year 6. Preparations for conversion to academy status sponsored by Powers Hall Academy are well advanced.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have managed the challenging circumstances brought about by staffing changes and illness by continuing to teach pupils in Year 6. Although this means that some detail is lacking in the school's analysis and planning for improvement, responsibilities have been more widely distributed, and less experienced leaders have risen to the challenge of supporting the drive for improvement enthusiastically.

At this stage, the school's assessment information suggests that pupils in Year 6 have made better progress than cohorts in previous years. Attainment at the expected level at the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics looks set to be broadly in line with the national average for 2014. More pupils are predicted to reach the higher Level 5 in reading and writing this year, matching the attainment achieved in mathematics last year. This proportion is still however, below the national average. This is an improving picture of achievement which is also reflected in the progress and attainment of pupils in Years 4 and 5. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium, extra funding for pupils eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority, are making similar to and sometimes better progress than their peers both in school and nationally.

The use of development planning is better focused. Progress against priorities is regularly reviewed with staff and governors. Consequently, there is more widely shared understanding of how well the school is doing and of what the next steps to

improve the school need to be. Expectations of both staff and pupils are higher and the level of challenge in lessons has increased. Pupils say that lessons are more interesting and they are expected to achieve higher standards in their work.

Pupils read in collaborative groups daily, they review the content and meaning of the texts they read, and this is helping them develop greater understanding of a wider range of books. Pupils speak enthusiastically about how these sessions help them develop confidence and understanding in their work. They show a good knowledge of a range of authors and of different types of texts and explain their favourite stories in detail.

Governors are kept well informed by the leaders' increasingly clear and robust analysis of how much progress pupils are making and of other aspects of the school's work. They evaluate improvement planning with leaders using this information so know how well the school is improving against the targets set. Governors ask more challenging questions and scrutinise the school's work more carefully. For example, in response to parents' queries about the level of challenge for higher-attaining pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body has asked governors to consider this with staff during their next visits to the school. Pertinent questions were also put to the mathematics leader during her presentation to governors. Regular visits and meetings are enabling governors to understand how well the needs of different groups are met, including those of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Although governors monitor how the pupil premium funding is spent and know how well disadvantaged pupils achieve, the level of detail relating to the impact of different ways the funding is used is insufficient to enable them to know which actions are the most successful and which provide the best value for money.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders and teachers have a good understanding of the progress all pupils are making and review this regularly. Work is increasingly undertaken with other schools and advisers to ensure the assessment information, on which this tracking of learning is based, is accurate. Leaders are confident about the improving standards achieved by pupils.
- The deputy headteacher has made clear the expectation that teachers plan to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes. As a result, there is no longer a reliance on additional intervention being provided to meet the needs of pupils falling behind because of ineffective teaching. Teaching assistants' work is increasingly well focused on helping children to make progress in their learning rather than enabling them to simply complete tasks.
- The capacity of all leaders to improve the school has increased. For example, the English and mathematics subject leaders have drawn on advice to rapidly

improve the quality and extent of their monitoring and leadership. These leaders now provide guidance on what should be taught and when, have started to monitor the quality of teaching and know how well pupils are achieving in their subjects. Actions to drive improvement include the implementation of the collaborative reading sessions and of more challenge in mathematics lessons.

- Because action has been taken to improve the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make), pupils in Year 3 are making better progress in their reading and writing. The vast majority have now achieved at least the standard expected for the end of Year 2 and were seen using these skills enthusiastically to spell more accurately in lessons.
- The approaches taken to improving behaviour are successful. Pupils are confident that behaviour at playtimes has improved. As one pupil said, 'The level of naughtiness is way, way down.' Pupils say they like the range of things there are to do at playtimes. In all the lessons seen, pupils were engaged in their learning, they demonstrated improved levels of concentration and a determination to succeed.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Some aspects of leaders' work lack the detail necessary to have an impact on improvement quickly enough. For example, actions identified in the reviews between senior leaders and teachers to help individual pupils make better progress do not specifically address the barriers to learning some pupils experience. As a result, the work planned for these pupils does not always help them make the rapid progress needed. When they monitor lessons, leaders do not always check how well teachers use their subject knowledge to help pupils understand new ideas.
- The marking of pupils' work has improved, particularly in terms of the feedback given regarding the quality of pupils' writing. However, standards are still too variable because teachers mark pupils' work for different purposes at different intervals with variable expectations about how and whether pupils respond. As a result, pupils are not all supported equally well to make good progress in their learning. In some instances, the comments pupils make on their own and others' work are not meaningful or well presented.
- Parents say they appreciate the improved levels of communication they receive through the school texting them. However, parents are unsure about the reasons and intentions for the school's conversion to academy status because these have not been shared widely enough.

External support

The strengthening partnership with Powers Hall, the academy sponsor for King's Ford, is bringing positive advantages. These include access to wider and relevant training opportunities for teachers and advice to leaders. Generous help has been provided to ensure that there is a stable staff team, which includes teachers for Year 6, in place for September. Staff have benefited from the work undertaken with other schools to ensure assessment is accurate and their practice improves. The headteacher has secured the support of a local secondary school to provide valuable subject specialist support for older pupils, initially in modern foreign languages.

The headteacher has found the analysis and endorsement of recent improvements made by the local authority's adviser to be valuable. The local authority has also supported some of the work of subject leaders and brokered the sponsorship from Powers Hall Academy. The local authority improvement board has continued to meet to review how well the school is improving, and this has provided governors with an external view of the progress the school is making. Improvement in the collaboration between the infant and junior schools, also a focus of this group, has been limited. Exceptions have been the work led by the deputy headteacher, which has enabled pupils from Year 6 to work with pupils in Year 2, and the exchange visits made by teaching assistants from the two schools. The board will continue to meet next year to continue the focus on improving the partnership between the infant and junior schools.