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2 December 2015

Miss Gemma Jackson  
Headteacher  
Sandy Lane Primary School  
Sandy Lane  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 2JG

Dear Miss Jackson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sandy Lane Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, one other governor and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I scrutinised documents, including the school's action plan, and information about teachers' performance and pupils' achievement. I also briefly visited lessons with you to see teaching and learning and to talk to pupils.

## **Context**

The interim executive headteacher left in July 2015 along with a deputy headteacher and eight teachers, five of whom had held middle leadership responsibilities. You were appointed in April 2015 and took up post this September. An assistant headteacher and eight teaching staff also joined the school at that time. The governing body was reconstituted in July 2015. Most of the members of the previous governing body left. Four remained, including one who is now the Chair of the Governing Body and one, a national leader of governance, who is now the vice-chair. Nine further governors have joined the governing body and only one vacancy remains.

## **Main findings**

You have not wasted a second of the short time in which you have been in post. You have galvanised your senior leadership team into a purposeful body focused sharply on improving teaching and raising achievement. Senior leaders share your high expectations and value the open and supportive culture you have established. They are now confident they can hold middle leaders and teachers to account for their performance, because everyone is pulling in the same direction. You are building your middle leadership team almost from scratch. You have defined suitable middle leader roles and the expectations for these. Talks are now under way with staff to determine who will take on these roles from January. This delay in establishing your middle leadership team is not ideal. As a result, work such as that to improve pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics is at an early stage as there has been no mathematics subject leader in place to drive this work. However, it was a sensible decision to establish your senior leadership team first and to make sure you understood the strengths and weaknesses of your broader staff group before appointing middle leaders. Meanwhile, you have made sure that teaching is continuing to improve. Regular staff training sessions have helped you establish consistently high expectations and successfully introduce new approaches. Teachers who had previously needed intensive support to improve have continued to receive individual support. During our visits to lessons, we saw that teachers had high expectations. Pupils were tackling suitably demanding writing tasks with enthusiasm, showing confidence in both creative and technical writing. The newly introduced 'steps to success' sheets, which pupils and teachers use to review weekly progress, are proving helpful. Pupils have quickly learned how to identify what they are doing well and where they need to improve. In Nursery and Reception, children were engaging well. Activities including letter formation were clearly fitted to children's varying starting points. You have made sure that you have a good understanding of each teacher's strengths and areas for development through lessons observations and learning walks, and by collecting information about each pupil's current attainment. You are now well placed to plan training specific to the needs and aspirations of individual teachers and further improve teaching.

Your new school action plan is clearly focused on addressing the issues identified in the previous inspection report. The plan suitably defines changes in practice required by key points in the future, your 'milestones'. However, it is not a sharp tool with which the governing body can hold you and your leadership team to account. The plan does not include enough detail about the steps you will take to achieve desired changes in practice, or the resulting improvements these will have on pupils' achievement. You and your senior team had already identified the need to rework the plan to address these points and you have agreed to send a copy of the reworked version to me shortly.

The governing body is starting to hold leaders to account more effectively. The newly appointed governors come with a suitable range of skills and have undergone governor training. Governors' regular visits to the school are providing them with a better understanding of the school's work. Senior leaders find governors to be more formal in their approach and their questioning more rigorous than previously. Governors have not yet undertaken an external review. It is booked in for early next term. This is a sensible decision, as the governing body has only just become established enough to be able to engage effectively with the review.

### **External support**

Local authority support has continued to have a positive impact. The local authority adviser linked to the school is providing useful challenge and support, including regular reviews of the quality of teaching. She has helpfully challenged you about the sharpness of your action plan. Teachers whose practice was weakest have received effective support from a local authority consultant. Sensibly, you did not bring in any further support this term as you needed time to establish the new team and understand exactly where further support is needed. The plan for the local authority mathematics adviser to support the new mathematics leadership group is well considered.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**