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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Kate Taylor
Headteacher
Hempstead Infant School
Hempstead Road
Gillingham
Kent
ME7 3QG

Dear Mrs Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hempstead Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 26 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that pupils receive greater challenge in mathematics in order to deepen their learning and make the best possible progress, particularly in Year 2
- ensure that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make rapid progress from their individual starting points across the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the governing body, the school's independent school improvement consultant and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last

inspection. I visited lessons in all year groups to observe learning. I considered a wide range of evidence provided by leaders along with information on the school's website. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks on adults working in the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has become part of the Hempstead Schools Federation, alongside the junior school, which operates on the same site. There is now one governing body that oversees the work of both schools.

Main findings

Leaders evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately, based on wide range of evidence. You and your deputy headteacher work effectively with governors to lead the school on its journey of improvement. You have high expectations of staff, who share your reignited vision for the school. Newly established performance management systems are linked to whole-school priorities and ensure that all staff play a role in contributing to pupils' outcomes. Middle leaders are held to account for their areas of responsibility and play a key part in checking that improvements are made across the school. They are aware of the work that is needed to secure ongoing improvement and are committed to achieving this.

Changes to the structure of the governing body since the last inspection have been instrumental in moving the school forward. The chair of the governing body, along with members of the governing body, has responded swiftly to the findings of the previous inspection. Governors perform their duties with rigour and are focused on their strategic role. They balance their support for leaders with suitable levels of challenge. Governors ensure that their statutory duties are met regarding safer recruitment checks and have useful processes in place that help them to monitor this.

Newly introduced assessment systems have enabled teachers to assess and monitor pupils' attainment and progress accurately. Teachers understand most pupils' needs well and use their knowledge of what pupils can already do to help them plan suitable learning activities. They share leaders' focus on improving outcomes for groups of pupils who need support to catch up, such as those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Pupils state that they enjoy coming to school. They can articulate the progress that they have made in various subjects and express an excitement about learning across the curriculum. Pupils describe how teachers regularly check their work and provide useful feedback that helps them to know what to do next.

Across the school, a new approach to the structuring of how reading, writing and mathematics are taught is helping pupils to learn well and make good progress, particularly in Year 1.

During the inspection, opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics were clearly evident. Leaders recognise, however, that teaching is not consistently effective across the school and that some pupils do not receive sufficient challenge in their learning, particularly in Year 2.

A review of the curriculum since the previous inspection has ensured that pupils are able to participate in a wide range of subjects and learning opportunities. As a result, pupils' knowledge of the world around them has deepened. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Pupils' current performance demonstrates effectively how the school is improving. At the end of the last academic year, headline measures across early years and key stage 1 improved from the previous year. The difference between the attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in the school also diminished considerably. Pupils currently in the school are making sound progress across the curriculum. However, there are some areas, such as in writing, where progress is less evident. Additionally, the progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities indicates that there is further work for the school to do to ensure that these pupils are supported effectively to catch up.

External support

As a result of the previous inspection, the local authority commissioned intense school-to-school support. Further external support from an independent school improvement consultant has also been sought by the governors. This range of support has contributed significantly to the improvements seen across the school. Local leaders of education have worked usefully with school leaders to develop their strategic understanding. Leaders, including governors, use the information they are provided from external sources to validate the quality of the school's work. This helps them to identify priorities for future development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector