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Emma McGuigan
Acting Headteacher
Holtsmere End Junior School
Shenley Road
Hemel Hempstead
HP2 7JZ

Dear Mrs McGuigan,

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Holtsmere End Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the governors and the local authority improvement officer who took the time to meet with me.

Several new members of the teaching staff have joined the school since the last inspection. The post of acting headteacher is covered by the deputy headteacher on an annual contract until the appointment of a substantive headteacher. An acting assistant headteacher and two assistant headteachers were appointed in March 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 22–23 February 2012, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that, at this time, the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Results from the 2012 national tests confirm that attainment in English and mathematics has risen to above-average levels at the end of Key Stage 2. Overall achievement in English and mathematics is improving as a result of better lesson planning and more focused marking by teachers. Pupils in Year 6 write in a neat joined-up style and presentation of their work is good. Spelling is mostly correct and punctuation is accurate as a result of weekly grammar lessons. Pupils are keen to express their ideas through writing. Typical of those written by more able pupils in Year 6 are sentences such as, 'He trudged down the desolate street in the roaring storm and found a bin to rest in.' Pupils across the school know the multiplication tables that they are expected to learn in each age group. They use this knowledge

well in daily mathematics lessons when completing simple calculations involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. For example, more able pupils in Year 3 can use subtraction to check the addition of three two-digit numbers. Pupils in Year 6 can calculate the area of complex rectangular shapes. Extra government funding and specific support for pupils who need it is helping to reduce gaps in achievement; for example, for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or for pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the help they get from adults in class. Some more able pupils do not achieve as well as they could in mathematics lessons. This is because activities do not encourage sustained effort or are not hard enough for them.

The regular checking of how well teachers help pupils to learn and make progress and the support given to individual teachers are helping them to improve their teaching. However, teaching is not yet consistently good for all pupils and still requires improvement in some lessons, particularly mathematics. In weaker lessons, teachers talk for too much time and do not make best use of resources to help pupils learn. Work is planned at the right level for each ability group for mathematics but not all teachers check carefully that more able pupils are completing the tasks set for them. As a result, misunderstandings are not corrected quickly during the lesson and this leads to slower progress for these pupils. In the good mathematics lessons, the teachers are clear about the best ways to help pupils to understand what they need to do to complete the tasks set. The pace of the teaching is brisk in these lessons and the planned activities allow all groups of pupils to achieve as well as they can. Resources such as the interactive whiteboard, extra staff and practical equipment are used effectively in these lessons to support good achievement. The marking of pupils' work is good across the school and an improvement from the last inspection. Pupils are given detailed guidance about their work, with clear pointers that show them what they need to do to improve. They respond well to these by completing corrections and trying hard to improve their work next time.

The good behaviour of pupils observed during the visit reflects the recent efforts of school leaders and staff to improve attitudes towards learning around the school. Pupils are responding well to the introduction of a new behaviour code which challenges them to do better; such as in being resourceful and resilient. The attitudes of girls towards mathematics are better because teachers make sure that girls are given more opportunity to answer questions in lessons. The spectacular displays of models and writing, completed for homework, about the ancient Egyptians and the Vikings, show how pupils are becoming more involved in their own learning.

The effectiveness of school leadership is much improved. A clear sense of teamwork is evident among the staff and all are keen to play their part in school improvement. There are good procedures to support improvements in teaching. The acting headteacher and other senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching in every class. The feedback they give to teachers, including those newly qualified, gives

clear guidance to them about what they have done well and what can be improved. This information is used effectively in the performance management of teachers. Teachers who need to improve are coached to help them to develop their skills further. This represents good improvement on this key issue from the last inspection. As a result of extra training, the governing body is more involved in checking the work of the school. Several governors have completed visits to school to gain a better understanding of what is taught in lessons. Written reports of these visits provide other governors with a more accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The governing body uses this information confidently to ask challenging questions of school leaders about what the school is doing to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

The local authority supports the school effectively in making the changes it needs to improve pupils' progress overall. The statement of action is detailed and helpful. Clear targets are set for raising standards and improving school performance. An improvement officer provides regular support to the leadership team. Teachers with specific expertise from a local school provide effective support to subject leaders in English. A local authority advisor provides effective support for mathematics. This good support is reflected in the effective systems now in place for school leaders to check the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in monitoring, evaluating and driving school improvement by:
 - ensuring robust systems are in place for gathering accurate information about the quality of teaching and learning
 - making sure that self-evaluation is based on a range of sources of evidence so leaders can plan improvements with a secure understanding of strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that subject leaders rigorously monitor the effectiveness of teaching strategies on the quality of learning for all pupils
 - making provision to manage, coach and support teachers so they develop their understanding and practice.

- Ensure that most teaching is good and any inadequate features are eradicated by:
 - developing teachers' competence in asking questions that encourage pupils to think deeply and justify their answers
 - ensuring that marking and feedback are consistent and sharply focused on helping pupils improve their work
 - ensuring that activities in class are suitably challenging for all pupils so they contribute effectively to their achievement.