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Janet McMurdo
Interim Executive Headteacher
Oundle and King's Cliffe Middle School
Cotterstock Road
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Peterborough
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Dear Mrs McMurdo

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Oundle and King's Cliffe Middle School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 February 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. I would particularly like to thank members of the governing body who made themselves available at short notice and the students who gave up part of their lunch time to share their views.

The interim executive headteacher took up post on 1 June 2012, shortly after the last inspection. A seconded senior leader has added additional capacity to a significantly restructured leadership team. Staffing changes have strengthened specialist subject teaching. There have been significant changes to the governing body, including the addition of two governors agreed with the local authority.

As a result of the inspection on 29–30 May 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 good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Following a sharp decline in 2011, the 2012 results for Year 6 pupils returned to above-average standards. Results in mathematics were a little better than those in English, especially at higher levels. Given starting points that are above average, this represents broadly average progress. The current progress seen in lessons by school leaders and during the visit indicates that progress in lessons is now mainly good. Early indications from school assessments show that more pupils are making and exceeding expected progress. Gaps in performance are being identified earlier and at

regular intervals, with interventions put in place in order to ensure that all groups, including the more able, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making appropriate progress.

Assessment data is now used well by senior leaders and by core subject leaders. Lesson planning shows that all teachers understand the level that pupils are working at, and are using this information effectively in matching work to pupils' individual needs. This means that pupils make gains in learning appropriate to their ability and prior skills and knowledge. There is a strong level of challenge in most lessons, particularly for the more able. Changes to teaching approaches mean that pupils are now more actively involved in their learning, as they were quick to recognise in discussions with the inspector. Recent initiatives to improve writing are having a measurable impact on reading and writing, particularly in Year 6.

Teaching is continually improving and school leaders' observations show it is now mostly good or better. Joint observations undertaken with the inspector indicate that senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and areas to develop further. Little teaching is inadequate, although some still requires further improvement. Lesson planning is consistently thorough and the use of assessment information ensures that it is well matched to the different abilities of pupils, including the more able and those with special educational needs. There is usually a good level of challenge for all, although, occasionally, work is pitched at the wrong level or is not in a logical sequence of learning.

In nearly all lessons, the teacher gives clear and concise information, then pupils are quickly moved on to paired, group or independent work. There was much active, engaging learning taking place during the visit, with many opportunities for pupil discussion. Although questioning is open and seeks to involve all pupils, it is usually teacher directed and does not encourage pupils to build on each other's ideas, explain their thinking or challenge each other.

The interim executive headteacher has brought experienced leadership and a determined, thoughtful approach to bear on school improvement. A key development has been to restructure and clarify senior staff responsibilities, increasing capacity. This has made senior and core subject leaders both more responsible and accountable for improvement, particularly in the day-to-day operation of the school and in the development of teaching. Systems and policies relating to behaviour and bullying have been revised and improved, and are now thorough. Incidents are recorded consistently, and followed through to successful resolution with appropriate communication to parents. Governors monitor this carefully, and report that the school staff have successfully resolved any incidents without them being escalated for their attention. More frequent newsletters have given more regular and helpful information to parents and the website is under re-development.

Two senior leaders, working closely in partnership across both sites, have had a strong impact on improving teaching. Effective training, followed by close monitoring of classrooms, has meant that nearly all staff have adopted key improvements. More targeted coaching, mentoring and sharing of practice are now refining the way that school leaders are helping to develop staff at different levels of performance. Non-specialist teaching is being successfully addressed through a more appropriate deployment of staff and by team approaches to planning and delivery.

Changes to and training for the governing body have increased their professional skills and they have established an effective committee structure. Governors are clearer about their roles and have good information, much at first hand, in order to hold the school more effectively to account. The local authority has offered a good balance of on-going support and challenge to 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

David Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement, particularly of more-able pupils, by:
 - ensuring that assessment data are accurate and systematically used, at whole-school level by school leaders to monitor pupils' progress and at classroom level to inform teachers' planning and target-setting
 - ensuring all lessons provide consistently high levels of challenge for all groups of pupils
 - ensuring that pupils are more actively involved in their learning.

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring all teachers are confident in the use of data to plan activities that meet the varying needs of all groups of pupils, including those who are more able, the disabled and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring an appropriate balance of teacher-talk and direct teaching, with pupil-talk and independent activity
 - developing teachers' questioning skills to extend pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding
 - facilitating opportunities for teachers to learn from best practice, both within and beyond the school.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all staff are robustly held to account for pupils' outcomes
 - paying rigorous attention to the systematic implementation of the school's behaviour policies, particularly in terms of bullying incidents
 - strengthening the school's capacity to deliver effective teaching and learning in the core subjects, particularly in English
 - developing the curriculum to include more imaginative, stimulating activities that promote pupils' interest and enjoyment in learning
 - strengthening and developing communication with parents and carers, in particular, ensuring that any concerns raised are investigated and the findings reported to them.