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6 November 2013

Mrs Janet McMurdo  
Executive Headteacher  
Oundle and King's Cliffe Middle School  
Cotterstock Road  
Oundle  
PE8 5HA

Dear Mrs McMurdo

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oundle and King's Cliffe Middle School**

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 April 2013. 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. The school should take further action to:

- amend the school development plan, so that milestones to judge success are clearer
- moderate pupils' work more systematically so that all teachers agree on grades
- make the learning environment more attractive and stimulating at the King's Cliffe site

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, members of the senior leadership team, a representative of the local authority, and the two members of the governing body. I evaluated the school improvement plan and a range of documentation. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to a range of classes.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of significant changes in terms of the school's senior leadership and teaching staff. 14 teachers have left since your last inspection, three of them senior leaders.

## **Main findings**

Your students' achievement declined last academic year. This means that you have greater improvements to make than those identified by your last inspection in terms of increasing the rate of students' progress.

You have completely changed the leadership structure, moving from an unwieldy 18 posts of responsibility into seven more focused roles. These 'Leaders of Learning' understand their responsibilities well and are held to account by you for their performance and for the performance of teachers and pupils in their areas. This is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching as staff benefit from detailed feedback on their lessons. Where necessary, teachers are subsequently given coaching or training to help them improve. There was much staff instability last year and, although some remains, much has been resolved.

There is a real buzz around the teaching of English, and almost every student had a book to read for pleasure. Teachers successfully encourage students to improve their writing by thinking of alternative vocabulary and phrasing. Good teaching which engaged students was seen in other subjects, including mathematics and science. Students now face a greater level of challenge, though this is not yet consistent in all lessons. Pupils are positive about learning. The quality of teaching is improving, though it is still too variable.

Best practice is shared among teachers, but procedures to evaluate its impact are not effective. This has led to some teachers choosing not to follow direction, for example, in improving the quality of marking. A new system to track students' progress is comprehensive but is not yet populated by robust data. You have plans in place to quickly address these areas for improvement.

The learning environment at King's Cliffe suffers by comparison with the vibrant, colourful surroundings of the Oundle site.

Governors are aware of the challenges facing the school and are taking steps to address them. They liaise with the governing body of an outstanding primary school in order to share expertise. They were adamant that the school has transformed over recent months and is a much better environment for learning.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The local authority representative knows the school well and has taken steps to meet its needs, including assisting with changes in leadership. The local authority is prepared to commit more time to helping the school improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**