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Miss Jane Betsworth
Headteacher
Millfields Community School
Hilsea Street
London
E5 0SH

Dear Miss Betsworth

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 June 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the pupils and to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, as well as the representative from the local authority who gave time to speak to me.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 October 2009, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards and achievement in mathematics and science by:
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge and skills.

- Improve pupils' academic progress by:
 - improving the consistency in the quality of teaching to match the best practice in the school
 - developing the ability of teachers to use assessment information to plan lessons that more effectively meet the learning needs of pupils
 - improving lesson planning so that time can be used more effectively to promote learning
 - setting challenging targets to enable the more able pupils to attain higher levels.

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.

From a below-average starting point the majority of pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress and for some progress is now good. Progress is improving because, after significant changes to staffing in the autumn term, the school has a core of experienced senior staff with high levels of expertise. They are providing effective help to colleagues which has enabled them to improve their practice. Pupils in Year 6 are doing particularly well, but progress is slower in other year groups. This is because the legacy of weak teaching is still impeding the rate of pupils' progress.

The systems senior staff use to regularly track pupils' progress are good. They give a clear picture of individual pupils' attainment and progress in relation to national expectations and are an important tool for identifying those pupils who need additional support. A range of intervention strategies is used to help these pupils catch up, and records show that these are effective in accelerating progress. The appointment of an assistant headteacher, with specialist skills in science, complements well the existing expertise of the assistant and deputy headteachers, and their work is contributing well to improvements. Standards are rising, but only slowly. Despite the improved progress in the last few months, there is a legacy of low achievement over several years, and there is still some way to go to remedy this underachievement.

Monitoring of teaching by the school and the local authority and inspection evidence indicate that teaching is now at least satisfactory and improving. There is a steadily growing proportion of good teaching. The focus is now firmly on how to promote learning through independent thinking and practical activities that engage and motivate pupils. The most significant improvement is that teachers have higher expectations of pupils, particularly in their acquisition and use of vocabulary. One pupil told inspectors that she had previously 'found work easy but now it is more challenging'. Others reported that science is now more focused on practical activities and mathematics has improved.

In the best lessons, teaching is characterised by tasks that are well matched to pupils' needs, a brisk pace, and a clear focus so that pupils know what they have to learn. Good questioning linked to the learning objectives, and a practical and interactive teaching approach, support the good pace of learning. Teachers use interactive whiteboards confidently to motivate and engage pupils. Planning is detailed, ensuring that appropriate work is identified for pupils of differing abilities and sets clear learning intentions so that pupils know what they are expected to learn. Challenging but realistic targets have been set for attainment at the end of Year 6 and pupils in the present Year 6 are well on their way to achieving these. Teaching assistants make a considerable contribution to pupils' learning. They work closely with teachers, supporting individuals and small groups. However, these strategies are not consistent throughout the school. For example, data are not always used to plan lessons that effectively tailor teaching in order to meet the wide ability range in each lesson. In particular, some teachers are not always skilled in modelling the small steps in learning needed to enable pupils to access more difficult work. In order to address the significant gaps in pupils' learning and ensure pupils

make the progress of which they are capable, more teaching needs to be of a higher quality.

The leadership team have challenged inadequate practice and are providing support to remedy the weaknesses. The improvements in teaching are due to robust and regular monitoring, targeted support and coaching. This is beginning to have a positive impact, although the leadership team recognise that inconsistencies remain. Staff development is given high priority and is well focused on the school's priorities that fully reflect the areas that are most in need of improvement. Discussions with middle managers indicate that they have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are fully aware of the need to change the culture of the school to one where the focus is firmly on good learning. The challenge for the school now is to ensure that the pace of improvement is further increased and that good practice is embedded into the life of the school.

The local authority has provided good support for the school. The local authority link adviser continues to work closely with the school to adjust and amend the support needed as the school makes progress, and has supported the school in establishing strong monitoring and evaluation systems.

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

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria
Her Majesty's Inspector