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20 September 2017

Mrs Verity Slaughter-Penney  
Headteacher  
Kymbrook Lower School  
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Bedfordshire  
MK44 2HH

Dear Mrs Slaughter-Penney

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kymbrook Lower School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 June 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that parents and carers are given more opportunities to approach the school to raise their concerns, and feel confident that leaders and governors will act upon the issues they raise rigorously and with transparency
- develop the role of all leaders and staff quickly, so responsibilities are shared, accountability taken and, consequently, you have more time to focus on the strategic direction of the school

- make sure that leaders and staff access best practice through further training, external support and guidance, so that they can develop consistently effective provision.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteacher and with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated alongside the school's improvement plan. Also, the early years action plan and leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning were scrutinised. Additionally, I reviewed governing body paperwork and school policies and their implementation, and undertook safeguarding checks.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, the school staffing has remained the same. An external governance review took place in March 2017. A number of new governors have joined the governing body since the previous inspection.

In September 2017, the school extends to include Year 5. The number of pupils will continue to grow to accommodate pupils up until the end of Year 6 when the school becomes an all-through primary school.

Building developments have now been completed at Kymbrook. There is still a building project underway at the federation school, Thurleigh Primary School. However, a project manager has been appointed to oversee this work.

## **Main findings**

You and other leaders demonstrate a renewed determination in playing your part in strategic school improvement. You now have a rapidly developing knowledge and understanding of your roles. You are more aware of your part in supporting teachers to improve outcomes for pupils. For example, more regular monitoring is undertaken to check the quality of teaching and learning across the school and additional pupil-progress meetings are scheduled to happen at the end of the academic year. This is beginning to secure more rigour in monitoring and evaluating and, consequently, in holding all teachers to account for the progress pupils make.

Newer governors are adding strength to the effectiveness of the governing body. Their in-depth knowledge and experience is contributing towards a more collaborative approach and an improved strategic focus. The external governance review is proving invaluable in helping governors to reflect upon their role and consider how best to improve the school. However, governors agree that some

actions could have been taken more quickly, particularly in ensuring that more members of staff take on leadership roles.

Leaders and governors demonstrate that they have used the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection to bring greater clarity and efficiency to their school strategic planning. A clear plan of action, with specific timescales, is ensuring that there is greater accountability for the changes being brought about. Some areas are improving more quickly than others, particularly in the early years. However, the work to ensure that you delegate effectively has not moved as swiftly. You are still overseeing too much of the day-to-day business, as well as the strategic work that is taking place. Consequently, there are areas that are improving more slowly, and governors are not yet able to assess that all actions are having an impact on moving the school forwards rapidly.

The greatest level of progress made in the school is within the early years. This is successful because the conscientious leader is working with the local authority adviser, heeding advice and relentlessly working on each area for improvement. It is evident that much work has been done to improve outdoor learning opportunities for the children. Children have access to several defined areas where they can explore and investigate their ideas. They are making choices in their learning and staff are responsive to children's discussions and questions. There is clear evidence that the information collected about the children is being used well to plan activities and is focusing on both supporting the most vulnerable children and challenging the most able children. Consequently, children are making better progress from their starting points. This is confirmed in the 2017 checked outcomes, whereby all children have achieved a good level of development. This has ensured that all children are well prepared for Year 1.

Relationships and working partnerships with parents have been through a turbulent time. You are working hard to communicate effectively with parents. For example, you have been keeping parents informed about the expansion to a primary school and the addition of a Year 5 class in September. However, a number of parents perceive that the school does not communicate well enough with them, and that leaders and governors are too insular. You and the governing body have identified that more work needs to be done to ensure that the whole parent community feels that leaders are approachable and that your actions are open and transparent.

Safeguarding procedures continue to be effective. Inspection evidence confirms that your systems for child protection are in place, routinely monitored and reviewed and rigorously applied. These include the recording of incidents and how you adhere to policies and procedures, for example the complaints procedures. You have proactively accessed a 'health and well-being' review of your safeguarding procedures. You have also used the local authority weekly safeguarding briefings to update your own systems. For example, recently, you reviewed your school concern form to sharpen up its purpose. You also changed your 'missing in education' policy in the light of advice and the latest guidance. This is ensuring that pupils are kept

safe and everyone is taking responsibility for the safeguarding of all children and pupils.

### **External support**

Following the inspection in November 2016, leaders have worked effectively with the adviser from the local authority. They use her regular and focused visits to the school to keep improving against the priorities identified in their action plan. School leaders appreciate the high quality of the support that the local authority has provided. This also includes valuable additional support for the early years, subject leaders and governors.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding

**Her Majesty's Inspector**