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Mrs R Sully
Interim Headteacher
Knowles Junior School
Queensway
Bletchley
Milton Keynes
MK2 2HB

Dear Mrs Sully

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 24 June 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the staff and pupils whom I met.

Following the last inspection, the headteacher retired at the end of August 2009 and an interim headteacher has been appointed and has been in post since September 2009. An interim deputy headteacher has also been appointed. The local authority has drawn up proposals for amalgamating the school with the nearby first school and these are out for consultation. If agreed, the amalgamated school would open in September 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 23 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- increase the proportion of good teaching in order to raise achievement
- ensure marking and target setting provide pupils with a clear understanding of how to improve
- provide more opportunity for higher-ability pupils to learn independently and use their initiative.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment in English and maths was low in 2007 and 2008, but improvements in pupil progress in both these subjects have led to attainment being broadly average



in 2009 and this improvement has continued at a faster pace throughout 2009–10. Since the inspection, pupils are making better progress as a result of improvements the school has made to teaching and learning. Of the seven lessons observed, teaching was good or better in six of them. This is most evident in Years 5 and 6 in English and maths where pupils are now making good progress. Teachers are paying much more attention to enabling pupils to learn at a faster rate. There has been satisfactory progress in relation to stretching the more able pupils in the school, but in some classes these pupils are still not stretched as fully as they could be. Good support is provided for those pupils in danger of falling behind. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

The school's plans communicate high ambition for raising achievement and for engaging parents positively in their child's education. The school is much more accurately assessing pupil progress and there are more regular reviews of progress with pupils. Good partnership work with the local first school has resulted in a smoother transition for pupils to Knowles so that pupils make faster progress than before. Assessment information is analysed increasingly well, for instance to regularly check the school is on course to reach its targets. This information is being used to hold teachers to account for the progress their pupils make. The school's senior leadership team is ensuring that the expertise and enthusiasm of staff are well directed towards improvement.

The emphasis on increased accountability has been matched by the development of improved approaches to learning. The results of this were apparent in the seven lessons observed during the visit. Lessons include succinct learning objectives. Teachers link these directly to pupils' targets and are now using assessment to design activities for different ability groups. Teachers regularly review learning as the lesson develops in order to check on pupils' understanding and further clarify the required outcomes. They have adopted sensible and efficient strategies that require all pupils to consider their responses. There is clear evidence in books that pupils are encouraged to work independently, but not all teachers stretch the more able in this way as well as they might.

Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers' comments generally help pupils to improve their work. Pupils said they valued these comments, particularly when they are linked to individual targets. The levels pupils are expected to attain are sometimes stated in the front of pupils' books, though not in all subjects. In the best practice seen, pupils and teachers are highlighting when there is evidence of levels being attained.

Parents and carers have had more opportunities to find out about their child's learning and parental consultation events have been better attended. The views of parents and carers are more regularly sought through questionnaires and responses.

The quality of support provided by those external to the school is good. The local authority consultants and the School Improvement Partner are providing good support that is helping the school improve.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector