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13 July 2011

Mrs Marilyn Hull
Headteacher
Ley Hill Junior and Infant School
Rhayader Road
Birmingham
B31 1TX

Dear Mrs Hull

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Ley Hill Junior and Infant School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 July 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils, parent and Chair of the Governing Body who met with me during my visit.

Since the last inspection the deputy headteacher has returned from her secondment as acting headteacher in another local school, and has taken on responsibility for co-ordinating special needs provision. New phase leaders have been appointed to Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Two teachers have returned to the school following maternity leave.

As a result of the inspection on 9 November 2009, 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 has made:

good progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



Attainment varies year-on-year, and is influenced by significant differences between year groups in the proportion of pupils who join the school in later years and the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nonetheless, across the school, the proportion of pupils reaching nationally expected levels in literacy and numeracy is often at or near the national average, reflecting the school's overarching mission to do 'whatever it takes' to ensure that pupils are equipped with the skills needed for later life. Pupils' rates of progress have been improving strongly over the last four years and this improvement has been sustained since the last inspection.

The school has been highly successful in stimulating pupils' interest in reading through a number of key initiatives. A scheme to encourage pupils to read and comprehend books through a web-based competition and rewards system has been particularly popular. Pupils and parents and carers note how this has promoted the enthusiasm of even previously reluctant readers. A wide variety of books are readily available within classrooms, and the junior library offers a warm and stimulating 'fairytale castle' environment. Pupils' enthusiasm for writing has also been promoted through a range of creative approaches. In English and in topic work across a range of other subjects, pupils are given many opportunities to write in a variety of forms. They are encouraged to talk about their ideas when developing their writing, and pupils' books show that they have made good progress in organising and structuring more extended pieces of writing. A pupil in Year 4 noted that writing is 'fun because we do role play when we write a story'. The school's new scheme for teaching phonics (the sounds letters make) is in early stages of implementation, and too often misses opportunities to allow pupils to develop and apply their phonic understanding and skills in activities suitably matched to their capabilities.

The quality of teaching overall has improved, particularly in the specific areas for development identified in the last inspection. Teachers' use of assessment to support pupils' learning is now a key strength. The use of marking ladders in literacy ensures that pupils have a clear understanding of their targets for attainment, and shows them what skills they need to demonstrate in their work to reach those targets. Pupils assess their own work with reference to these targets, and their well-developed understanding of the skills on which they need to focus enables them to establish their own success criteria for many lessons across Key Stages 1 and 2. In mathematics, alongside regular skills tests, pupils' work is marked regularly to clearly identify gaps in understanding. Where such gaps are identified, pupils recomplete work and undertake further exercises to address shortcomings in their knowledge. The consistent use of 'pink marks' in all subjects to show pupils where they need to develop work further enables pupils to understand how to improve. Pupils are now able to take responsibility for improving their own learning, and, within a clear assessment framework, most can work independently to meet their targets. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective help in class and through focused interventions out of class to support their learning. The quality of work to extend the challenge for the more able varies, however; and the school recognises the need to improve further the number of pupils reaching higher levels of attainment.

The headteacher has continued to inspire staff in their determination to improve outcomes for pupils. Leaders at all levels contribute to rigorous school self-evaluation by monitoring closely the progress of individual pupils and checking regularly on the quality of provision they receive. Phase leaders work closely with teachers in their teams to monitor and improve provision, and to enable teachers to see and share good practice. This has led directly to more consistently good teaching throughout the school. The school draws successfully on a range of partnerships and external support, choosing packages of resources and associated training to address specific areas for improvement, for example in reading, writing and assessment. Detailed improvement planning is based on a clear appraisal of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and has been strongly focused on addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the school's last inspection report.

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

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009

- Improve attainment and progress in English by:
 - using talk to explore the creative aspects of writing
 - increasing pupils' interest in reading.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - eliminating the few occasions when teachers talk for too long and increasing the opportunities for pupils to work independently and use their initiative
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment accurately
 - improving the quality of written feedback in mathematics.
- Accelerate the rate at which teaching moves from satisfactory to consistently good by:
 - ensuring that all leaders are focused on rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of initiatives
 - modelling and sharing good practice.