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13 October 2011

Mr S Robinson
Principal
Birley Community Primary School
Hayfield Crescent
Birley
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S12 4XF

Dear Mr Robinson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Birley Community Primary School

Thank you for the help which you, your senior leaders and other staff gave when Kevan Crowther, Additional Inspector, and I inspected your school on 14 October 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to the acting Chair of the Governing Body, the representative of the local authority and the pupils who spent time talking with inspectors.

The executive headteacher, who was in post at the time of the last inspection, left the school in July 2010. The primary phase leader became the acting headteacher at that time. In September 2011, a new principal of the federation took up post. The primary phase leader was redesignated as the vice-principal, primary. She is currently absent from school. The Chair of the Governing Body at the time of the last inspection has stepped down from that role and there is currently an acting chair in post.

As a result of the inspection on 1 February 2010, 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' attainment by the time they leave the school has dropped since the last inspection. A decline in the results of the national tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2011, especially in mathematics, places the school's provisional figures significantly below the national averages. The provisional percentage of pupils gaining the expected Level 4 or above in both English and mathematics was 59%, against a prediction of 81%. This is considerably lower than the assessments made within the school in 2010, and did not meet the floor standard set by the government, which is the minimum target expected for primary schools. That group of pupils did not make expected progress in mathematics where, again,

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the relevant floor standard was not met. It was, however, met in English. The dip in attainment was not picked up through the school's monitoring of pupils' progress and, in light of this, potential inaccuracies in the assessment judgements being made by teachers have been identified. This means that data about pupils' progress across the school are not fully reliable. Pupils' work indicates variation in current rates of progress across the school.

The school has identified that work in lessons is not always closely matched to the full range of pupils' needs or at the right level of challenge for all, especially in mathematics, and that this limits pupils' progress. Evidence from the inspection confirms this. Nevertheless, the teaching seen during the inspection had a range of positive features. Classrooms are generally well organised and managed. Friendly and constructive relationships between adults and pupils create a supportive climate for learning. The purpose of tasks is usually explained clearly, with some effective efforts made to make them interesting. Teaching is stronger, currently, in Year 6 where a clarity of purpose, fast pace, effective questioning and a careful checking of pupils' learning as lessons proceeded are features. Across the rest of the school some of these features are present, but not consistently so. Pupils are willing, keen and cooperative learners who want to do well and work hard. When given the chance to exercise independence and take responsibility for their work they are able to do so, but such opportunities are not created as a matter of routine in lessons. A positive example of pupils exercising initiative and independence outside lessons was seen in an assembly where a team of Year 4 pupils presented a video that they had produced on 'taking responsibility for each other' for Birley TV News. Every pupil has several, appropriate targets to help them improve their work. However, there is variation in the extent to which they know and understand them, with pupils in Year 6 more familiar with them than younger pupils. They are not referred to enough by teachers in lessons. The presentation and completion of pupils' work have improved, including in upper Key Stage 2, where there were weaknesses at the time of the last inspection. However, this is still not consistent. The marking of pupils' work is also variable across classes; generally, it is better in English than in mathematics.

The school has taken a range of positive actions to promote community cohesion within the school and its locality, based on an informed understanding of its context. There is less evidence of its promotion on a wider front and there has been some tailing off of activity in recent times.

Uncertainties around leadership and management since the last inspection have slowed the pace of improvement. These are not fully resolved. However, the new principal has quickly identified areas that need to be improved and has begun to take steps to tackle these. Plans for further developmental work are being drawn up and some innovative approaches for the future are being considered. The principal is leading the school with determination and focus at a difficult time, but it is too early for actions to have had a significant impact. The governing body is committed to the school and is conscientious in its work, although it took some time for decisions to be made about permanent leadership arrangements at the recent transition. The governing body is in a state of flux itself, with acting leadership. It does ask questions of the school, but its monitoring of it has not been sufficiently rigorous, with some

over-reliance on senior leaders for the supply of relevant information. Arrangements for vetting staff are thorough and meet requirements.

The local authority has provided input and enhanced support for the school over the past year. However, this was not sufficient to prevent the dip in attainment.

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

Joan McKenna
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, particularly in relation to accelerating the pace of learning and using questioning effectively.
- Ensure that all pupils, particularly those in upper Key Stage 2, develop their independent learning skills and pay sufficient attention to the presentation and completion of their work.
- Implement the plans to improve the promotion of community cohesion.