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Mrs Judith Kings
Halesbury School
Feldon Lane
Halesowen
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Dear Mrs Kings

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Halesbury School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Could you please pass on my thanks to the school community for the welcome they extended to me during my visit. Would you also pass on my gratitude to the pupils who spent their lunchtime giving me their views of the recent changes in the school.

As a result of the inspection on 25 January 2012, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the previous inspection, the school's data collection systems have been developed and are more detailed and fit for purpose. The school now has systems in place so that data is collected from teachers and analysed by leaders six times per year. However, it is early days and the school is not yet able to draw robust conclusions about the progress that pupils make over time. The targets that are being set for pupils' progress are ambitious, and reflect higher expectations as they are based on the upper quartiles of national data related to how much progress pupils make relative to their starting points and age. Regular pupil progress meetings are held to monitor those who are at risk of not meeting their targets. The range of external accreditations available has increased so that pupils are currently accessing qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1, with plans in place to extend this to include Level 2 qualifications. The school has recently introduced new strands to the curriculum including functional skills, enterprise and topics which support learning in foundation subjects. Leaders have also targeted some of the money from the pupil premium to provide holiday courses for pupils who need extra support.

This money has also been used to partly fund a parent outreach worker to support families who need further help and advice.

During this monitoring inspection, ten lessons were observed by the inspector. These included lessons across a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, design and technology and phonics sessions. All teaching seen was graded as requiring improvement or good. This included some teachers who were able to demonstrate clear improvements in their teaching since the previous inspection. In all lessons seen, no progress made by pupils was judged as inadequate. This is a tangible improvement compared to January. Lesson observations were undertaken with members of the school's leadership team. Subsequent discussions showed that they have a good awareness of where there are strengths in teaching and what needs to be done to support and challenge teachers to improve further.

In all lessons it was clear that teachers are using their knowledge of pupils' levels more effectively to support their teaching. Literacy has become a significant focus for all teachers. This was demonstrated through reinforcement of key words within all subjects. In the better lessons, teachers and teaching assistants use skilful questioning to promote better learning and understanding. There is also significant evidence of pupils developing the skills required to assess and evaluate their own work against learning objectives and targets. However, the school is not yet developing these skills so that pupils can assess the work of their peers. The quality of feedback provided to pupils by staff has improved. There are now more examples of feedback which provides pupils with an understanding of the levels they are working at, alongside targets for further improvement. Pupils were able to share their targets with the inspector through the use of small cards which serve as reminders to them of what they need to do next.

The use of phonics in discrete sessions and in other subject areas has become a priority aspect of the school's work. Children from the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils up to Year 9 are given daily input in developing their understanding and use of phonics. Several examples were seen of phonics being used across the curriculum to help pupils with their reading. Pupils say that the introduction of exercise books has helped them to organise their work better. Their implementation also makes it easier to see the progress made, over time, in lessons. Pupils now have individual intervention plans in place, which are referred to regularly by teachers in lessons. These reinforce pupils' knowledge of their targets and, where appropriate, what they need to do to improve their work.

The Early Years Foundation Stage continues to be a significant strength of the school and has improved further since the previous inspection. The new enhanced outdoor area is used extensively to provide continual opportunities for children to move between the outside and indoor areas. The systems for recording progress are robust and show clearly strong achievement for all.

Relationships, between adults and pupils, in lessons and around school, are positive and improving. Many examples were seen of staff consistently applying behaviour management strategies to individual pupils. This served to appropriately challenge incidents of negative behaviour. Pupils are clear that their behaviour is improving as a result of this and the new system of rewards and sanctions that has been implemented. The number of incidents is reducing significantly. When the school plans an intervention to support a pupil, they now include clear exit strategies so that leaders can monitor the impact of various types of support.

The post-Ofsted statement of action was evaluated by Ofsted. It meets requirements and is fit for purpose. However the subsequent support provided by the local authority has been inconsistent. Some aspects have not helped to effectively support improvements in the school and, as a result, progress was less than would be expected in the term following the inspection. Since that time, the school and local authority have worked well together to enhance the improvements made.

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

David Muir

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Improve achievement for pupils across all subjects by:
 - establishing precise and accurate, moderated assessment during this term that reflects the independent work and abilities of all pupils
 - setting targets based on the pupils' age and levels of learning that reflect high expectations
 - extending additional work on specific literacy, mathematical and social skills
 - embedding strategies within specific individual intervention plans so that all staff help pupils to achieve more across the curriculum.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils make better progress by ensuring:
 - all teachers understand and use the range of levels pupils are working at to prepare work that will enable them to make progress during lessons
 - all staff are able to use skilled questioning in lessons so that they can provide a suitable level of challenge for each pupil
 - staff help pupils to record and keep work in a variety of ways in an organised sequence
 - teachers give useful feedback adjusted to the levels of pupils' understanding so that pupils are aware of how well they are learning and how they can improve their work.

- Improve the consistency with which adults interact with pupils who find engaging with learning difficult by:
 - making sure the whole-school reward and sanctions policy is used consistently and the reward system is referred to frequently by all staff
 - establishing individual plans, where required, that give precise strategies to be used in a range of contexts so that pupils understand the consequence of their actions and staff have clear guidance about how to respond in a consistent way.