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25 January 2013

Mrs S Palmer  
Headteacher  
Downs Way School  
Downs Way  
Oxted  
Surrey  
RH8 0NZ

Dear Mrs Palmer

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Downs Way School**

Following my visit to your school on Friday 25 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the senior management team, the Chair of the Governing Body and two parent governors as well as a representative from the local authority. The recently devised school improvement plan (known as the Post-Ofsted Action Plan) was evaluated. A range of documentation, including examples of lesson observation monitoring and governing body minutes was also reviewed. The HMI was taken on a tour of the school by the headteacher. Brief visits were made to all classes.

### **Context**

One class is currently being covered by a temporary teacher. A permanent appointment has been made to take up post at the beginning of the next school

term. A member of the senior management team with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage, mathematics and assessment will be leaving school at the end of the academic year. New appointments will provide some opportunity to further review roles, responsibilities and the management structure of the school.

## **Main findings**

The school improvement plan, which has been written since the inspection of November 2012, correlates precisely with the areas for improvement identified. However, the plan is insufficiently focused on improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement as a result of actions proposed. Timescales, targets and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating progress lack urgency and precision.

The headteacher and other senior staff possess an increasing awareness of what needs to be done in order to strengthen leadership, including in the use of pupil assessment data analysis to drive further improvement. Some examples of more sophisticated use of data exist in relation to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs.

To date, only the headteacher has been involved in the monitoring of the quality of teaching. Although lesson observations carried out this term have had a specific focus (phonics teaching which is the linking of letters and sounds), evaluations are typically general, rather than sharply focused on the progress that pupils make and the next steps that teachers must take to improve their teaching further. A comprehensive plan to increase the headteacher's skill, confidence and accuracy in lesson monitoring is already established. Following this, other senior leaders will also receive training. Teachers currently have too few opportunities to see good and outstanding teaching so as to improve their own practice.

The governing body has agreed to take part in a review led by the local authority. High quality advice and guidance from an advanced skills governor has been pivotal in strengthening the governing body's understanding of the extent of their strategic role, including in driving improvement and holding senior school leaders to account.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- strengthen the improvement plan to include: measurable targets that are clearly related to impact upon pupils' outcomes, more urgent and specific time-frames, and clearer accountability for monitoring and evaluation
- ensure senior leaders (including governors) are more confident in using data as a strategic tool to drive improvement and to hold all staff to account

- facilitate opportunities for all teachers to observe good practice, accompanied by a local authority advisor, to strengthen their understanding of what constitutes good and outstanding teaching.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority is providing extensive high quality support to the school and this has been critical in securing improvements to date. Local authority monitoring prior to inspection gave rise to concerns and a programme of challenge, monitoring and support was immediately implemented. A consultant headteacher has been appointed to provide leadership support to the headteacher for two days per week until the end of the academic year. Equally strong guidance is being provided for English and mathematics co-ordinators as well as the governing body. The school is drawing effectively on this support and can now more clearly identify their own development needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**