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20 September 2013

Headteacher  
Ms S Ashby  
Northolmes Junior School, Horsham  
Leith View Road  
Horsham  
West Sussex  
RH12 4ET

Dear Ms Ashby

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Northolmes Junior School, Horsham**

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- increase the expectations that teachers have of pupils' standards of work, and their capacity to learn quickly, by using the demanding targets you now have when planning lessons to ensure that they continually stimulate and challenge thinking, and adopt teaching strategies that support rapid progress and a sense of fun in learning
- build bridges between the governing body and the staff of the school so that the undoubted ambition each have for the pupils here can be realised.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I had meetings with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's improvement plans and scrutinised aspects of safeguarding procedures.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection three new teaching staff, including a new special needs coordinator, and a teaching assistant, have joined the school. There is now an additional member of the senior team.

## **Main findings**

You and your senior staff are rising to the challenge of making this a good school. During our discussions you stated, with admirable precision, the single most important change to bring about in order to bring this about: higher expectations, expressed through teaching that is consistently more exciting and challenging. Your development planning is wide ranging and detailed, and contains useful references to developing mechanisms to monitor pupils' achievement, holding staff regularly to account for improvements in pupils' standards in English and mathematics, and providing high quality feedback to pupils. All of these actions signal to staff that pupils can achieve more, and will do so by being supported expertly.

You have begun to bring about fundamental changes in the way that the school operates. Teachers are now aware of the significance of measuring the ground gained by pupils, term by term, using average point scores. They also know that you are going to require them to adopt new teaching techniques to improve the pace of pupils' learning. For example, there are already improvements in the quality of teachers' marking through the adoption of 'next steps' comments on pupils' work. It is less clear how you are going to be sure that this good practice is driving up standards.

The two main development plans I studied, addressing improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupils' achievements, are useful documents. They are rather lengthy, however, and there is some overlap between them which begs the question of why they are not combined into one plan. The interim performance measures are useful and should ensure that, when the formal evaluations you have scheduled at certain times of the year are undertaken, there will be no surprises. These plans have the capacity to help you to hold staff to account for carrying out the agreed actions to the standard defined, whatever their role in the school. The achievement plan focuses usefully on the performance of groups of pupils. You are well aware of the need to raise the achievement of pupils eligible for the pupil premium so that gaps between their achievements, and of all pupils nationally, are closed. There is a need for more ambitious progress targets here, given that gaps have already

opened. Plans recognise the urgent need to improve the achievement of the most able pupils in all year groups; this is closely associated with the issue of the expectations teachers have of these pupils on a day-by-day basis.

The development plan in response to the inspection report's third improvement point, around leadership and management, has not been finalised. This is, in many ways, the key document. It must address the fact that governors and the school are not yet working in harmony, despite each having the best interests of the pupils at heart. Governors, and the local authority, expressed their confidence in you, and in the school's capacity, to rise to the challenge of making this a good school. The current lack of coordination and agreement about ways of working and how your role and governors' roles mesh efficiently and effectively together must be addressed soon, so that you can make the differences needed here.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. We agreed that a visit in March next year would be useful in order for me to gauge the extent to which you are addressing the two key actions above. You have already secured places on one of our 'Getting to Good' conferences, and I will keep you informed about other events that we run to support school improvement.

### **External support**

The local authority appropriately identified the school as requiring extra support before the last inspection. A link adviser offers useful challenge and support through working closely with you and the governing body. Links with a neighbouring secondary Teaching School are strong and valuable; your staff benefit from access to their good quality training courses. Other valuable support includes an associate adviser who supports the leadership of English and, soon, mathematics. You are working with headteachers of other schools around developments in leadership and management. The link adviser is aware of the need to improve the quality of the working relationships between the school's senior leadership and governors; the local authority's governor services team should have a role in this.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex and as below.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**