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Mr Philip Hibbs
Headteacher
Harmans Water Primary School
Wellington Drive
Harmans Water
Bracknell
Berkshire
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Dear Mr Hibbs

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harmans Water Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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 effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school's actions are well-focused but in the early stages. We agreed that my next inspection visit will focus on how far teaching and learning are improving as a result of actions taken and how successful you have been in developing the capacity of subject leaders to contribute to this improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I jointly observed two lessons

with members of the senior leadership team and looked at work in children's books. I read a range of documentation, including the local authority review of the school, notes of their monitoring visits, the school's self-evaluation and a governor information pack.

Context

The current senior leadership team has been in position for approximately five weeks. You took up post in September 2013, two months after the inspection and following the retirement of the previous headteacher. A new assistant headteacher also started in September and the acting deputy headteacher was appointed permanently to his post.

Main findings

Although you have been in post for a relatively short time, you have already taken decisive and effective action to improve the school. Your analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses is sharp and accurate. You have drawn up improvement plans that are well-focused on the right priorities. You have already begun to change the staffing structure so that it is better suited to a large school. Senior leaders now know exactly what their roles are; lines of accountability are clearer and stronger, which helps everyone play their part in raising pupils' achievement. A stronger and more tightly-focused senior team is emerging.

The Chair of the Governing Body has overhauled the roles, structures and functions of the governing body. There is a marked coherence between his approach and yours, which strengthens the drive for improvement. He is determined to ensure that governors are able to make a full contribution to the school because they know its strengths and weaknesses well and contribute to its improvement. He is actively recruiting governors who bring valuable skills and experience to complement the existing team. He has developed an induction pack which helps new governors quickly understand the job. A new structure, with four vice chairs and four shadow positions, mirrors the requirements of the raising achievement plan, so that governors can more easily monitor achievement at each stage of a pupil's education. Minutes of the most recent governing body meeting show mutual challenge and discussion about how best governors can contribute to the school's improvement. They also demonstrate better lines of reporting from headteacher to governors, tightly linked to the school's raising achievement plan, enabling governors to challenge the headteacher more rigorously against targets and agreed indicators of success.

While leadership is strengthening and focused on the right priorities, it is too soon after your appointment to be able to identify real improvements in teaching or in achievement. Nonetheless, observations of lessons during the visit confirmed that

senior leaders can evaluate learning sharply and give feedback to teachers that is both hard-hitting and developmental. Your own notes of classroom observations and evaluations of children's work are clear and direct. You have set more ambitious targets for achievement and are uncompromising about hitting them. You know what needs to be done and have made a strong start. Equally, you are under no illusions about the scope of improvement needed; the raising achievement plan communicates the right degree of urgency without under-estimating the task in hand.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You have a strong working relationship with the local authority and it provides you with useful external evaluations of the school's progress. It had accurately judged the school's effectiveness prior to the last inspection and was setting clear expectations for its improvement. The local authority school improvement adviser has arranged for an advisory teacher to support teachers working in the upper year groups for one day per week. You have targeted this additional support appropriately on teachers' planning and its impact on achievement.

You have made links with an outstanding school and have good plans in place as to how you will use this partnership to develop teachers' understanding of good and outstanding practice so that it becomes the norm in your school.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector