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8 October 2013

Mr Terry Green  
Executive Principal  
Nishkam Free School  
3-11 Soho Road  
Handsworth  
B21 9SN

Dear Mr Green

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Nishkam Free School**

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 should take further action to:

- Make the intended outcomes, listed in the action plan, sharper and more measurable so that governors can hold the school more effectively to account for the achievement of different groups of pupils.
- Check more frequently whether all teachers are following agreed policies.
- Ensure short timescales are set when giving teachers next steps to help them improve the quality of teaching. Follow these targets up quickly to maintain a rapid rate of improvement.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two members of the Governing Body and a representative of the Elliot Foundation to discuss the

action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Other documents were examined: the school's checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' work, samples of teachers' planning and pupils' work, the most up-to-date information about pupils' achievement and records of support from the Elliot Foundation. Short visits were made to lessons to talk with pupils and look at their learning.

## **Context**

The headteacher left the school at the end of September. The deputy headteacher is currently acting headteacher, overseen by you as Executive Principal for Nishkam Schools. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and will join the school on a part time basis during October.

## **Main findings**

You, the senior leaders and the governing body have responded to the issues identified at the section 5 inspection with a clear focus and determination. Governors acted decisively to strengthen the capacity of leadership to drive forward rapid improvement. They wisely plan to evaluate the effectiveness of current leadership arrangements in the short term and are considering suitable options to maintain continuity. Governors are working closely with you and the acting headteacher to build a picture of the school's effectiveness for themselves. In addition, they appropriately seek external verification of their own evaluation.

Additional teachers and associate teachers have been deployed to provide smaller teaching groups with extra challenge for more able pupils. Leaders report this is helping these pupils make better progress. Teachers have received training in how to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the more able. Lesson plans show increased focus on these pupils, for example through the use of challenging questions or investigative activities. Pupils' books indicate some are still not challenged enough in lessons as they spend time repeating work they can already do.

In this inspection, many pupils were seen to be actively involved in their learning. However, time was wasted for a few pupils who sat passively when they had finished their work or were waiting for help. Pupils' books show that, in some classes, teachers use agreed approaches for marking pupils' work to give clear guidance for improvement. This is helping pupils make swifter progress. In other classes, the marking process is not used as well as this. Some effective questioning was seen, through which a teacher checked pupils' understanding in a mathematics lesson. She then quickly moved the pupils on to harder work when they were ready. In another lesson, the teacher did not use questions in this way so missed the opportunity to address some pupils' misunderstanding or to challenge other pupils further.

The school's improvement plan includes suitable actions to address the issues identified at the section 5 inspection. It shows clear responsibilities and accountability. Timescales are appropriate to achieve rapid improvement. Overall the plan provides a useful framework to move the school towards the next level. However, the plan would benefit from the addition of more measurable intended outcomes for some actions so that governors can keep a very close check on improvements being made.

Senior leaders, supported by external consultants, check the quality of teaching and the work in pupils' books. These checks focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement. Feedback to teachers shows them what they are doing well and where improvements are required. The dates you expect to see these improvements are not always recorded and so it is not clear whether they have been followed up.

### **External support**

You have drawn effectively upon a range of external support to provide training for teachers in meeting the needs of all pupils and to improve the work of subject leaders. Teachers have visited other schools to observe good and outstanding practice. You have actively sought to include primary educational expertise on the governing body. Governors are seeking to develop effective ways to judge the impact of external support and thus ensure it provides value for money.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for insert local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**