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22 January 2014

Lynn Samwell-Smith  
Headteacher  
Giffard Park Primary School  
Broadway Avenue  
Giffard Park  
Milton Keynes  
MK14 5PY

Dear Mrs Samwell-Smith

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Giffard Park Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2014, 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 October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

The headteacher and senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- review arrangements for the leadership of special educational needs. In particular, ensure that the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator carries sufficient time and capacity to improve the achievement of this group of students rapidly.

Governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The governing body should take immediate action to:

- clarify its role in driving improvement, specifying both how it will improve its own function and how it will challenge and monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan
- ensure that the imminent review of governance is highly effective in developing a full complement of skilled governors able to bring about the urgent improvement of the school.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and read other documentation related to school improvement, including minutes of governing body meetings and records of observations of teaching. I visited all classrooms briefly to observe learning and spoke to a range of pupils about their work. I held an additional feedback meeting with a wider group of governors in the early evening immediately following the inspection.

## **Context**

One teacher is on long-term sick leave. An interim deputy headteacher will be replaced by a newly appointed permanent post-holder at Easter. A new leader of the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs also starts at Easter. The role of special educational needs co-ordinator is shared by two teachers, one covering one day and the other half a day per week.

## **Main findings**

Since the inspection, you have introduced a new and more effective system for monitoring pupils' progress. This supports much closer scrutiny of how different groups of pupils are doing, such as those eligible for free school meals. As a result, teachers are better informed about the needs of different groups of pupils and better able to plan for them to learn effectively.

During our visits to classrooms, you made perceptive observations about where teaching was more, or less, effective. An important focus for the school has been to improve pupils' writing. We saw a teacher skilfully enable a small group of pupils to discuss and compare different ways of starting a sentence to make a greater impact on the reader. They made astute comments to one another about what worked best and why. Conversely, we saw some teachers unwittingly confuse pupils by taking too long over dictionary definitions and losing the impact of powerful vocabulary choices.

Records of teaching observations are detailed and, in some cases, precise, about what pupils have learned or can do as a result of teaching. Others, however, are less likely to have a positive influence on teachers' practice because they are not explicit about the progress of different groups of pupils within the lesson. They are sometimes too vague, such as saying, 'more able pupils made good progress,' without specifying what it was that made the difference. Records do, however, provide a clear picture of how effective teaching assistants are in supporting learning. You have reviewed and re-focused the use of teaching assistants to good effect, ensuring that they are better trained to provide targeted and more specialist support to pupils.

The under-achievement of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs remains a concern, not least because leadership of this area of the school's work is too piecemeal. The role of special educational needs co-ordinator is shared between two teachers, whose time allocation adds up to less than a full-time job. This needs urgent consideration by the governing body.

The governing body is not fully staffed and is about to appoint a new chair. The review of governance recommended by the inspection has not yet started. The school improvement plan says very little about the role of the governing body and does not specify the actions it will take to improve its own function or to monitor the performance of the school. Governors are not challenging enough and lag behind other school leaders in the contribution they are making to the school's improvement.

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**

The local authority provides well-balanced intervention to the school, combining the support of a school improvement officer with the challenge of six-weekly meetings, holding you to account for progress on the improvement plan. It has also brokered the support of a local Teaching School Alliance, through which your strongest teachers will access an 'outstanding teachers' programme. The school improvement officer has a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The local authority has also linked the governing body with a national leader of governance, who will evaluate its effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**