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4 February 2014

Judith Lovelock  
Almond Hill Junior School  
Almonds Lane  
Stevenage  
SG1 3RP

Dear Mrs Lovelock

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Almond Hill Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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.

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:

- Ensure the monitoring of teaching and learning is more effective by:
  - evaluating and recording the progress of all groups of pupils in lessons
  - following up targets for teachers to improve rapidly with follow-up checks to ensure matters have improved
  - making regular judgements about the progress pupils are making in their books to compare with progress data
  - increasing the regularity of drop-in checks of progress in lessons and providing recorded feedback to teachers about what is going well and what could improve

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher. We toured the classrooms together. I met with other school leaders, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I looked at documents including the school's improvement plans, achievement data and records of your monitoring activities.

## **Main findings**

Governors and other school leaders are determined to address any weaknesses in the school. Teaching is improving. Teachers' marking and feedback has become more helpful in showing pupils what they have done well and what needs to improve. Leaders monitor the quality of marking regularly.

Support and training is being provided for the weakest teaching and more of this is planned. In lessons, most pupils are focused and engaged in their work. Classrooms are stimulating learning environments. Pupils have increased opportunities to write in a range of lessons. There is not always a clear and real purpose for their writing, however. Some pupils have fallen behind and are becoming reluctant learners, new strategies are needed to help them catch up quickly and become more confident.

Joint work with the feeder infant school has increased recently in order to aid smooth transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 and avoid a dip in attainment between Years 2 and 3. The schools are planning a topic of work which will bridge both years. The school has good links with the local secondary school. Secondary teachers visit Almond Hill including to work with the most able pupils. There are plans for this school and the secondary school to join in federation to build further on this joint working

School leaders observe teaching and learning regularly but this monitoring is not always as rigorous as it could be. Leaders do not always evaluate the progress of groups of pupils in lessons. They do not routinely judge the progress pupils make in their books. Drop-in visits to classrooms to check that things are improving, are not regular enough and do not provide recorded feedback to teachers.

The school's action plans address all of the areas of improvement from the section 5 inspection. A review of governance has taken place and there is a plan to improve governance. Governors now ask questions that are more challenging and have the skills to hold school leaders to account. Governors know how pupil premium funds are used and they measure the impact of this spending in closing the gaps in attainment for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.

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**

A local authority representative visits the school regularly to monitor its progress. It funds the services of a local leader in education to support the school's leadership.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**