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26 February 2014

Mrs J Ault  
Headteacher  
Great Harwood Primary School  
Rushton Street  
Great Harwood  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB6 7JQ

Dear Mrs Ault

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Great Harwood Primary School, Lancashire**

Following my visit to your school on 25 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. 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 all pupils benefit from strong teaching day-in and day out by tackling the remaining inconsistencies in a small minority of classrooms
- focus more closely on the gaps in pupils' achievement to help all groups to make swifter progress from their starting points.

### **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, a local authority officer and three members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We visited most classrooms to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. We also watched four lessons led by four teachers. I met with 12 pupils from Years 5 and 6 to gain their views on the changes you have made since the last inspection. School data,

including the unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised alongside your school improvement plan and evidence of your checks on teaching.

## **Context**

Two teachers retired at the end of the summer term and a new Year 5 teacher took up post at the beginning of the academic year. One Reception class is being taught by a temporary teacher to cover a period of extended leave.

## **Main findings**

No one has stood still since my last visit. As a result, Great Harwood Primary School is moving forward in leaps and bounds. Almost every area of the school is improving because you are taking the right action at the right time to tackle weaknesses. Staff, leaders and governors are firmly behind you; they are giving their energy and time to making sure pupils get the best out of their time in school.

Your work over the past year is bearing fruit. Standards at the end of Year 2 were the best they have been for a long time; they almost matched the national average. This is a real step in the right direction as it means Year 3 pupils no longer need to race to catch-up as they have done in the past. Standards fell at the end of Year 6; they are low compared to other schools in the country. However, this group of pupils had lower than average starting points when they joined Year 3; they were almost a year behind in their learning. Your work to improve teaching helped them make-up some lost ground, particularly in writing and mathematics, so that many made better than expected progress from their low starting points. Pakistani pupils did not do as well as other groups. Pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding made the same progress as their classmates in writing, but they did less well in reading and left Year 6 two terms behind their peers. Your own data show pupils' achievement is improving steadily; many of the current Year 6 pupils have already made the progress expected from them by the end of the year.

Teachers are embracing the changes you have making with enthusiasm because they share your desire to succeed. They value the feedback you provide following your frequent checks on teaching and seek to act on your advice and guidance. Greater opportunities for teachers to take part in training events is helping to refresh their skills and giving them the confidence to bring out the best in pupils. Improving subject knowledge means many teachers are keen to try out new ways of teaching which is raising pupils' interest and excitement and fostering a real love of learning. Some teachers are really leading the way; they skilfully shape lessons to develop pupils' creativity, problem solving skills and their joy in reading and writing. Nonetheless, you know there is still some work to do to make sure all teaching lives up to the emerging strengths across the school.

Subject leaders are going from strength-to-strength. They are playing their part in lifting the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. Their clear guidance to teachers means basic skills are a daily focus in all classes. This work is helping to improve pupils' handwriting, spelling and number

skills. Subject leaders have a sharp eye for detail and are alert to any weaknesses in their subject areas. Their clear action plans show they know what needs to happen next to continue the pace of improvement.

Pupils are full of praise for the changes you have made. They particularly relish the increasing number of visits and visitors to the school which is broadening their horizons and making learning more fun. Pupils say they are working much harder than they did in the past and they believe they are making better progress. Pupils generally think behaviour has improved; they say bullying hardly ever happens, although they point to some hurtful name-calling from time-to-time. However, they are confident the school's behaviour policy is keeping most pupils on track and helping them to live up to the school's core values by respecting each other.

The governing body are stepping up to the mark. An external review of governance has sharpened their understanding of the role while a recent skills audit has led to the right people being on the right committees. They are increasingly confident to ask challenging questions because they are better placed to analyse and understand data. Their frequent and purposeful visits to the school are helping them to see, for themselves, the difference your work is making to teaching and pupils' achievement.

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 has signalled its confidence in your progress by reducing the intensity of its support. It knows you are more than capable of identifying your own priorities and tackling remaining weaknesses. Nonetheless, it has not cut you adrift, but is remaining close at hand to make sure you can access the support you may need to keep the school moving in the right direction. You, the staff and the governors value this partnership. The work of local authority consultants is proving to be particularly successful in updating teachers' skills and helping subject leaders to seize their role.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**