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26 September 2014

Tania Watts  
Headteacher  
Briar Hill Primary School  
Thorn Hill  
Briar Hill  
Northampton  
NN4 8SW

Dear Mrs Watts

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Briar Hill Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 June and 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- sharpen up the school improvement plan to ensure that the criteria used to measure success is closely linked to pupils' progress milestones
- ensure that governors and sponsors have a clear and specific role in monitoring the work of the school
- develop further strategies to ensure the reliability of pupils' assessments, especially in Key Stage 1.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, The Chair of the Governing Body, subject leaders and a representative of the sponsor, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Other school documents were also scrutinised such as pupils' assessment data and external reviews. I visited all classrooms with you, during which I spoke with pupils informally about their work and checked at their workbooks.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection a new leadership structure was introduced; two acting assistant headteachers have been appointed. One newly qualified teacher has been recruited to teach in Year 2.

## **Main findings**

You, senior leaders and sponsors have put together a good plan of action to address all the areas identified in the last section 5 report. The actions are strongly supported by a comprehensive training and development programme and monitoring calendar. Some of the criteria used to measure success, however, are not clearly linked to pupils' progress outcomes. This means that governors and sponsors may find it difficult to effectively hold leaders to account.

Training for staff to develop their marking and feedback skills has already led to a more consistent application of the school policy. Pupils know and understand the purpose of the new policy and their role in it. Since September, a new and robust early intervention plan has been put into place; for example, no time was wasted in Year 1 before providing appropriate support for those pupils who had not reached a good level of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage. The staff's engagement with pupils' assessment information is improving; in many classes seen, teachers grouped pupils according to what they knew and understood and provided challenging learning opportunities, especially for the more able. Nearly all pupils were fully engaged in their learning. Where learning was less successful, there was a mismatch between what the data said they could do and what the pupils could actually do. Leaders recognise the need to ensure that assessment information is reliable by drawing on a range of evidence to secure judgements, for example through pupil interviews and observations.

The school invests strongly in the development of its subject and senior leaders. Current subject leaders for mathematics and literacy have received a range of training opportunities, including mentoring from the assistant headteachers and support from an external consultant from the trust. The English action plan demonstrates a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the

development of literacy across the school which mirrors closely the whole school improvement plan. Like the whole school plan, the success criteria are not always sufficiently linked to pupils' progress outcomes.

New leadership structures, introduced by the headteacher, have improved the way that the areas for whole school responsibility are distributed. The two acting assistant headteachers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are keen to drive improvements in the quality teaching and learning. The current leadership team is strong and committed.

The small local governing body, also known as the 'local advisory board', is chaired by someone who is able, experienced and knowledgeable. She brings valuable expertise in helping to support the headteacher and hold leaders to account. Other members of the governing body regularly visit the school and carry out monitoring activities. Their monitoring role, and that of the trust board, in the school improvement plan, is not sufficiently well explained or described, which may hinder their effectiveness in checking the work of the school.

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 David Ross Education Trust (the school's sponsor) has provided a range of support to help drive improvements. The school improvement partner works closely with you to develop strong quality assurance activities; she has developed your leadership skills and provided useful external validation of school self-evaluation judgements. Other advisers from the trust have been instrumental in developing the skills of subject leaders. The local cluster of schools within the trust work together to share good practice on a regular basis and contribute to ensuring pupils' assessment data is reliable.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire and DfE, Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**