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15 October 2014

Mark Wilkes  
Highfields Primary School  
Elder Lane  
Burntwood  
WS7 9BT

Dear Mr Wilkes

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Highfields Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 that all teachers are skilled in teaching writing so that pupils' progress accelerates and is at least in line with rates of progress nationally
- make sure that leaders and governors are able to fully and accurately evaluate pupils' achievement in comparison to national averages.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plans were evaluated and I considered a number of documents including written records of the checks leaders

make on the work of teachers and the achievement of pupils. I also made brief visits to classrooms.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection, two teachers have left the school and three new teachers have been appointed.

## **Main findings**

Since September, leadership capacity has been increased as the deputy headteacher no longer has responsibility for a class. Together, you and the deputy and assistant headteachers have created action plans which cover all the areas for improvement identified during the Section 5 inspection. These plans set out the steps that will be taken in order to make the necessary improvements and name the leader responsible for each action. Your plans specify the activities that leaders will undertake to check on the impact of each aspect of the plan but do not always set out clearly enough the measures that will be used to judge success. The targets set for standards in writing at the end of Year 6 are below the national average and so do not reflect high expectations for pupils. Targets for achievement in mathematics and reading are more appropriate.

You and other senior leaders understand the urgent need for improvement. However, your judgements about the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's work are over generous and do not reflect the weaknesses in achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2, particularly in writing.

You are right to prioritise improvements in teaching and you recognise that in the past, weaknesses in teaching have not been tackled quickly enough to ensure that all pupils make good progress. However, leaders are now making more frequent checks on the quality of teaching by examining teachers' plans for lessons, making more regular visits to classrooms and looking more often at the work in pupils books. Written records of this monitoring are detailed and thorough; they identify strengths in teaching and set out areas for improvement. The feedback given to teachers following recent checks made by senior leaders responsible for English and mathematics also provides teachers with useful examples and suggestions about how the required improvements can be made. Your records are clear about how and when leaders will check that teachers have acted on this feedback.

You are beginning to make stronger links between the weaknesses you identify in teaching and the training you provide for teachers. For example, your own checks have confirmed that teachers do not always plan lessons and activities which are at the right level for pupils of different ability. You recognise that the work set for the most able pupils is not always challenging enough to ensure that these pupils make rapid progress. In order to improve teachers' skills you have planned training which is focused on helping them to plan and deliver lessons that build on what pupils of different ability already know, understand and can do.

Where teaching is not yet consistently good, leaders have put in place personalised programmes for individual teachers which set out clear expectations for improvement within a specified timescale and provide a package of training and support. School records indicate that this approach is beginning to have a positive impact.

Teachers have all received training in the teaching of writing and the senior leader responsible for English has encouraged teachers to provide interesting experiences for pupils in order to stimulate enthusiasm for writing, especially for boys. For example, during my visit a very large and realistic dinosaur visited the school. Teachers have planned a variety of writing activities to make the most of this memorable experience. The English subject leader is also making more frequent checks on the writing in pupils' books and provides guidance for improvement to individual teachers. These initiatives are positive but further action must be taken to ensure that all teachers are skilled in teaching writing in order to ensure that pupils' progress accelerates.

Leaders now have good systems for tracking the attainment and progress of classes and groups of pupils. Leaders meet more regularly with class teachers to discuss the progress of pupils in their classes. These meetings focus on those pupils who are not making enough progress and together leaders and teachers decide what will be changed in lessons and what interventions will be provided to address underachievement. Records also state how leaders will check that the actions agreed have been implemented and are being effective.

You have established a parent forum in order to ensure that you have a good understanding of parents' views and are developing a range of communication methods to ensure that parents are kept up to date.

Governors make regular visits to the school and they too understand the need for urgent improvement. Minutes from their meetings show that they ask questions and provide a measure of challenge to the headteacher and other leaders. However, the responses of senior leaders are sometimes not recorded in the minutes and on occasions governors rely too heavily on the information provided by the headteacher rather than checking against national standards for themselves. Governors recognise that their skills need further development and are soon due to attend training to help them compare the attainment and progress of pupils at Highfields with that of pupils nationally.

### **External support**

Governors and school leaders agree that the local authority commissioning manager for school improvement provides very good support to the school. She knows the school well and provides appropriate challenge to school leaders and governors in order to maintain their focus on improving teaching in order to raise achievement.

A national leader in education (a successful local headteacher) has started to work with the school but it is too early to see any impact from this work.

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

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**