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12 November 2014

Sean Tobin  
Executive Headteacher  
The Willows Primary School  
Church Road  
Basildon  
SS14 2EX

Dear Mr Tobin

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Willows Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 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 November 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 that all senior leaders have the training they need to understand how to use pupil data and information from monitoring activities to raise standards
- develop and train middle leaders to take responsibility for improving teaching and learning in their subjects
- provide further training for governors to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to support and challenge school leaders effectively
- strengthen the school development plan by including clear criteria which governors can use to check the school's progress.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the three deputy headteachers. I met with three members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the section 5 inspection. I also met with a representative from the Basildon Excellence Panel. I visited lessons with you and we talked informally to pupils and looked at their books. I also reviewed the school's action plans and your records of monitoring activities. I scrutinised the record of safeguarding checks on newly appointed staff.

## **Context**

The previous headteacher left the school in August 2014. The executive headteacher was appointed to lead the school. A part-time deputy headteacher returned from maternity leave in September 2014. A full-time deputy headteacher was recruited in November 2014 and is taking responsibility for leading provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs following the departure of the previous post holder. One part-time teacher left the school in August 2014. Four teaching assistants have joined the school in November 2014. A new chair of the governing body was recently elected.

## **Main findings**

Following the section 5 inspection in November 2013 some time was lost and the pace of improvement was not quick enough. Outcomes for pupils of the Key Stage assessments in summer 2014 did not improve significantly.

You have a clear vision for how to improve Willows School and are drawing on resources from the other school you lead to help support this improvement. For instance, teachers and leaders from the linked school are demonstrating good practice in teaching and leadership. You have ensured that teaching and learning are monitored more regularly. This includes by visiting lessons, looking at the work in pupils' books and scrutinising teachers' planning. This is helpful in gaining an accurate view of teaching over time in each year group. Teachers receive helpful feedback to improve their teaching and if they need some training, you ensure that it is provided. Sometimes, follow-up observations to check that areas for improvement have been addressed do not happen quickly enough.

You and other leaders ensure that whole school systems and higher expectations are becoming more consistent in the school. For instance, teachers are much clearer about what is expected of them in lessons and how they are required to mark pupils' work. There are early indications that teaching and the work in pupils' books is improving.

You have implemented a system to teach phonics. Pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 are taught in ability groups for their daily lessons. It is too early to see the impact of this

work. Some of the staff who lead these lessons are new to the school. Some of them require further training to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach phonics consistently well. During our tour of the classrooms, we saw that most pupils were engaged and focused in lessons. The classrooms are usually well ordered and inviting.

Some members of the senior leadership team are either new to their roles or developing them to become more effective. Some are not yet making effective use of the information the school holds about achievement and the quality of teaching to support the executive headteacher in making improvements. The school also lacks effective middle leadership of most subjects.

The governing body has re-organised some of its procedures to better fulfil its role. A new Chair of the Governing Body has recently been appointed. Governors recognise that they require further training to ensure they can support school leaders and hold them fully to account. The governors are currently considering the future of the school. They are considering a range of options, including continuing to work closely with the linked school, before they decide on the permanent leadership of the school.

The required safeguarding checks are made to ensure that new staff are suitable to work with children. These checks are recorded diligently.

### **External support**

A representative from the Basildon Excellence Panel visits the school regularly to monitor its work. A recent review of the school's progress, teaching and leadership set an accurate baseline for the new executive headteacher to build on. The school draws on training opportunities from the local authority, from the linked school and from other providers. This is proving helpful in developing teachers' and leaders' skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**