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Kay Butler  
Birchen Coppice Primary School  
Woodbury Road  
Kidderminster  
DY11 7JJ

Dear Mrs Butler

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchen Coppice Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 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.

While senior leaders and governors continue to take appropriate action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the section 5 inspection, the pace of improvements over the past year has been too slow. Therefore, these actions have not been effective. The school should take further action to ensure monitoring activities lead to swifter improvements in the quality of teaching.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders as well as members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring inspection. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated and other documents scrutinised, including records of the monitoring of teaching quality, information about pupils' achievement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and notes from meetings with the local authority to discuss the school's progress. A series of short visits was made to lessons to observe learning, talk to pupils and look at the work in their books.

## **Context**

You took up your post in September. The deputy headteacher, who had previously been acting headteacher, has taken up a secondment to another school. A senior teacher continues in the role of acting deputy. The governing body has been re-constituted and has a new chair and vice chair. New members of the governing body have not yet been fully trained in carrying out their role.

## **Main findings**

Since taking up your post, you have set clear expectations for the quality of teaching and have provided appropriate training opportunities for teachers. This has led to improvements for some pupils. Nevertheless, the impact of actions is limited because leaders have not checked quickly enough to see if teachers are following the advice given or are adhering to agreed practices, such as the approach to marking pupils' work. Consequently, pupils' achievement in several classes has not improved. You have, rightly, used lots of different evidence to help you build a picture of the quality of teaching across the school. However, your judgements on the quality of teaching remain too generous because they are still unduly influenced by how teachers perform in observed lessons.

Some teachers have responded well to the high quality coaching programme you have established. This is helping their teaching to improve. This is not so for all teachers. Some have had fewer opportunities to work with an experienced colleague. Some have not taken advice sufficiently on board. Pupils' books in a number of classes show teachers do not expect pupils to work hard enough. Tasks are too easy and teachers accept only a small quantity of writing when pupils are capable of achieving more. Teachers allow pupils to hand in work that is untidy. This gives pupils the message that sloppy work is acceptable, so they continue to lack pride in their work.

You and governors have questioned whether the learning support units, linked to each part of the school, provide the best use of funding. You are right to be concerned. While younger pupils in the unit benefit from high quality individual teaching by higher-level teaching assistants, older pupils are not so lucky. Teaching fails to capture their interest or to help them master basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders at all levels are collecting a more useful range of information about pupils' achievement. However, this information is not used effectively because it is not shared widely enough. For example, pupil progress figures given to governors do not reflect the significantly different rates of progress made by pupils in mainstream classes and those in the learning support units – yet this information exists. Such data show that the significant catch-up effort made in Year 6 helps pupils attain closer to national standards than they might otherwise have done. Nevertheless, the

same information indicates not enough is being done to help pupils catch up in other classes. This is why pupils' scores in national tests for Year 6 are still so far behind those in other schools.

The re-constituted governing body now better understands its role. Governors are aware that the quality of teaching is still not good enough to help pupils catch up on already lost ground. Some governors are now much more involved in checking pupils' achievement. However, many new governors have not yet been sufficiently trained to know how to oversee improvement. Therefore their actions have had little impact so far. The governing body has set out appropriate steps towards becoming effective in an action plan. Governors have identified measures to show whether most of these steps have been achieved. A recent evaluation of this plan shows that some actions have been achieved but others are behind schedule. The governing body is unable to demonstrate what impact completed actions have had on pupils' achievement. This is because the success measures describe what will be happening, not what difference the actions will make.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. At this visit, it was agreed that you will continue to send termly achievement information and your reports to the full governing body to HMI. You and other leaders will attend HMI-led workshops as directed.

### **External support**

The school is making better use of support from a National Leader in Education (NLE) and a successful pupil referral unit (PRU) to clarify the criteria by which pupils will be judged to need to move into an out of the learning support units. Nevertheless, advice from the NLE and PRU has not led to effective teaching and good achievement for all pupils. The local authority continues to oversee the rate of improvement through project board meetings. These meetings are used to challenge the school to demonstrate improvement and to examine aspects of the school's work in depth. Notes from these meetings indicate the local authority is accurate in its description of the school's strengths and remaining weaknesses. However, evaluations of whether actions taken are effective are sometimes more positive than the evidence has indicated. This leads to the school having an overly confident view of the rate of improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**