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27 February 2015

Lynn Dunn  
Headteacher  
Bhylls Acre Primary School  
Bhylls Lane  
Castlecroft  
Wolverhampton  
WV3 8DZ

Dear Mrs Dunn

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Bhylls Acre Primary School**

Following my visit with Jeannette Mackinney, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25–26 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

- The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.
- The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.
- The school may appoint newly qualified teachers to Key Stage 2 before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014**

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils' progress accelerates, by ensuring that all teachers:
  - use accurate assessment information to plan and provide engaging and challenging activities that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
  - use correct grammatical terms when teaching writing, provide stimuli for writing that enthuse and motivate pupils, particularly boys, and ensure that pupils complete a good volume of work in the time provided
  - give younger pupils suitable reading books to build up their phonic skills
  - ensure that pupils learn to form letters correctly, develop neat and consistent handwriting and take pride in the presentation of their work
  - carefully check pupils' work in mathematics lessons, and quickly move pupils on to new learning as soon as they are ready
  - give pupils clear guidance when marking their work so that they learn from their mistakes and know what they need to do to improve.
  
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - establishing a leadership structure and team that has the capacity to drive the necessary improvements
  - ensuring that leaders at all levels develop the necessary skills in monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching
  - ensuring that teaching and support staff receive high quality training in order to develop their skills
  - assessing the impact of the support and guidance provided to pupils
  - improving the curriculum through giving pupils more opportunities to apply their calculations skills in solving mathematical problems
  - developing the skills of the governing body in evaluating pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, so that it can hold school leaders to account more effectively for the impact of their work.
  
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. This should include a focus on the use and impact of pupil premium funding. Ofsted has made recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 February 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, pupils, parents, governors, the local authority's improvement consultants, and the headteacher from Perton First School, which is providing support for Bhylls Acre's leadership and teaching.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in October 2014, one full-time and one part-time teacher have left the school. A new teacher has been appointed to the Reception Class. One class in Key Stage 1 has been taught by supply teachers since mid-January 2015 to cover the sickness absence of the permanent class teacher. The school's approaches to reading and to teaching the sounds that letters make (phonics) have been reformed. A review of governance by the National Governors' Association has been completed, and the school's improvement plan has been redesigned.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Pupils' progress in reading has improved markedly in response to a raft of new strategies put in place after the last monitoring inspection. The new regular tests of pupils' reading ages relative to their chronological ages provide convincing evidence of significant progress in a short time, and show that gaps are closing for those whose reading is weaker. A reading culture now prevails, as pupils read widely and often, at school and at home. Pupils told inspectors how much they enjoyed reading, especially now that they can choose from a wide selection within groups of books of increasingly challenging levels of complexity. Pupils are able to draw on a range of strategies, including phonics, to help them read more difficult words. Pupils' understanding of the meaning of the texts they are reading is improving through the many opportunities that now exist within the timetable for pupils to discuss their interpretations.

The quality of pupils' writing is, however, undermined by weaknesses in basic skills of spelling and handwriting. For older pupils, a legacy of poorly developed reading and phonetic skills leads to too much inaccurate spelling and some restriction on the breadth of vocabulary that pupils can use with confidence. Some younger pupils early in Key Stage 1 demonstrate too little sustained improvement in their handwriting and in the clarity of their written work. In the Reception class, while children are developing good phonics skills to help them read, the progress in writing of a few is held back by poor pencil grip and control.

Pupils across the school are responding well to the increasingly complex number work they are given in mathematics. A group of eight pupils in Year 6 are relishing

the challenges of working to achieve the highest Level 6 in their national tests, and showing much resilience and skill in, for example, successfully understanding and using algebra. While pupils across the school offer well-reasoned solutions to mathematical problems in mathematics lessons, they have relatively few opportunities to develop and apply their number and measurement skills in other subjects and activities.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching has improved sharply in many of the areas identified as shortcomings in the section 5 inspection, although not consistently so across the school. Teachers are now making generally very effective use of assessment information to identify pupils' attainment and progress, and to plan work that is well matched to the varying abilities of pupils in their classes. Pupils themselves acknowledge the impact that this is having on their progress: 'The levels and targets in books help you know what to aim for and what you've done', said one. 'We're certainly being pushed', said another. Expectations about what pupils can achieve have risen accordingly.

Teachers and teaching assistants mostly plan very effectively together to ensure that more-able pupils are challenged and less-able pupils are well supported. Teachers use resources well to stimulate the interest of boys and girls in learning, and manage classes and behaviour effectively to ensure that all are purposefully engaged in activities. There remain, however, a minority of lessons where pupils make too little progress because they are unclear about the task and what is expected of them.

Just occasionally, written outcomes are weak because pupils have too little time to complete tasks well, or are not reminded to give their writing sufficient care. By contrast, teaching in Year 5 is highly effective in assiduously checking, throughout lessons, that pupils are applying the good handwriting and presentation skills they practise in their 'early morning tasks' into all of their work. There are no longer any indications of the poor use of grammar by staff themselves that were reported in the last inspection.

Teachers mark pupils' books regularly and point out what needs to be done to raise standards, although they do not always ensure that all pupils systematically respond with corrections or improvements, including in spellings.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour around school and in classes is very positive. In classes, pupils display a thirst for learning and apply themselves to their work with interest and enthusiasm. This is a key factor that has helped them to make better progress. They are well motivated to succeed and appreciate the better guidance that they are now getting from teachers and teaching assistants.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher has created a palpable sense of forward momentum in improving all aspects of the school's work. The headteacher is quick to recognise, praise and develop good practice among her staff, yet rigorous in identifying and addressing underperformance. As a result, she has created a united staff team, firmly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's improvement plan now identifies very specifically the actions needed to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection, and sets clear interim targets against which the success of these actions can be periodically evaluated. The 'core group' of school leaders, key governors and key providers of external support checks the school's progress in detail in its half-termly meetings. As a result, leaders and governors clearly understand the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Leaders have already achieved significant successes already in key areas, such as improving reading, but recognise that further improvements are needed in aspects of teaching and pupils' writing.

The overall approach to improvement is well considered. It has focused strongly on building the school's own leadership capacity and raising the expectations of staff by enabling them to see, understand and share good practice. The new key stage coordinators, who, together with the headteacher, form the school's new senior leadership team and lead on English and mathematics, have received very effective support in the development of their roles, including in monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching. Staff told inspectors how much they valued the accessibility of, and direction given by, all senior leaders.

Leaders have enabled staff to collaborate more closely in moderating the accuracy of assessments and tracking pupils' progress, so that underachievement can be more quickly recognised and appropriate action taken. However, the school's current system for presenting data on pupils' achievement needs to be refined: it does not provide a sufficiently clear indication of the rate of progress made during the year by classes and groups of pupils. Staff have received regular and effective training in key whole-school developments, such as the new phonics programme. They also value working with colleagues in new partner schools to develop aspects of their practice.

Governance has improved sharply in response to the findings of the last monitoring inspection and the review completed in December 2014. Governors have now formed very active links with classes and aspects of the school's work. They visit the school and lessons regularly, and produce detailed reports and recommendations for action based on their visits. Governors have been active in working with the headteacher to develop better ways of presenting them with information so that they can hold the school more readily to account. At the time of this inspection, the

governing body had yet to finalise an action plan for governance to provide a clear direction for the further development of its work.

### **External support**

The school has benefited much from a well-planned framework of external support for the development of leadership capacity and teaching quality. The local authority improvement consultant and the local leader of education supporting the school have played prominent roles in monitoring and evaluating the school's progress through the core group meetings. They have also facilitated useful links with other schools for staff and leadership development. Local authority consultant support has been used effectively to develop the monitoring role played by the new senior leaders.