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Mr Bryn Gibson  
Headteacher  
Harwell Primary School  
The Styles  
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Dear Mr Gibson

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

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. 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:

- develop the role of middle leaders more fully to monitor the impact of initiatives on improving pupils' progress.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, three members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan. In addition, I scrutinised other school documentation, including records of leaders' monitoring activities. I joined you on a tour of the school and visited every class, taking the opportunity to talk to pupils about their learning. I observed several enrichment activities including the school choir rehearsing and members of the local

church leading 'mindfulness' workshops for pupils in Year 5. The single central record was checked.

## **Context**

A class teacher with responsibility for Year 6 pupils is leaving at the end of term. A new teacher will start in September. A class teacher with responsibility for Year 5 pupils has been absent since May 2015. Several teachers are moving year groups in September 2015.

## **Main findings**

Since joining the school in September 2014 and following the recent inspection, you have acted with resolve, setting a clear trajectory for improvement. You describe yourself as a 'collector of good ideas' and this way of working is strongly evident throughout the school's action plan. Drawing from different sources, including that of the local authority, you are making good use of consultants and external support to build capacity and address each key area needing improvement. The plan makes clear who is responsible for delivering improvements and there are clear timescales and measures of success. The most recent school performance information shows that standards are improving, particularly in the early years and Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. In Key Stage 2, more pupils are making better progress.

You have introduced robust procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. You make regular checks on the quality of teaching and look at pupil performance information through a sharp lens, identifying any signs of underachievement at the earliest opportunity. Middle leaders have begun to undertake some aspects of this work but this is at an early stage.

Attainment is rising. Disadvantaged pupils in particular are catching up with their classmates and achieving similar standards and in some cases higher standards. You have developed wisely the type of support that these pupils receive and it now caters more precisely for their needs. As a result, pupils catch up quickly and more are achieving the standards expected for their age. You have also developed the curriculum, incorporating strong links with the local community. Opportunities like the craft club with the local full circle and 'mindfulness week' activities led by local parishioners, ensure pupils have a strong sense of emotional well-being, developing their spiritual and social understanding well.

You have introduced well-judged changes to the way mathematics is taught. Pupils have regular opportunities to use their calculation skills when problem solving. For example, pupils in Year 6 have designed their own theme park, calculating the running costs and pupils in Year 3 have costed shortbread ingredients from three different supermarkets. In addition, the school has purchased a range of mathematical equipment to aid the development of pupils' conceptual

understanding. Pupils across Key Stage 2 are using their skills well and developing their mathematical understanding and reasoning skills in real life contexts.

Teachers and teaching assistants have received helpful training, including from the local authority, on the teaching of early reading skills. Leaders have adapted the school's approach. Teachers carefully plan next steps of learning. Unvalidated results this year show that standards in the Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) check have risen considerably and more pupils have achieved the standard expected for their age.

In the early years, leaders use children's learning information to help those at risk of not developing the skills and understanding typical for their age to catch up. The quality of teaching in the early years is improving. Teachers have had regular opportunities to observe good practice in other settings. They plan appealing activities such as making models of pets as part of the recent 'All creatures great and small' topic. However, work to develop the outdoor learning area is at an early stage. That said, activities are well planned and cover the different areas of learning.

Governors have completed two useful reviews. They are determined that the school improves quickly. The Chair meets regularly with you and the school's improvement partner. Collaborative working ensures that governors are fully involved and kept abreast of developments. Governors have benefited from training and offer robust challenge to key leaders. Members of the educational effectiveness committee interrogate school performance information thoroughly. The relatively new clerk has strengthened records of meetings so that they clearly document the questions that governors ask. Communication between the governing body and families is developing well with the helpful addition of a governor newsletter.

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 local authority is providing helpful guidance to you in your first year of headship. A comprehensive support package is in place which makes good use of advisors' expertise. In addition, you have received useful support from a National Leader of Education from King Alfred's Academy. The school benefits from frequent visits from the school's nominated local authority advisor who is a serving headteacher. Additional support has complemented the key improvement priorities, and includes staff training in the teaching of mathematics, the teaching of early reading skills and support for pupils with special educational needs. The local authority has a clear view of which support will be most useful to leaders and this is facilitating rapid improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**