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Mr Tom Evans  
Headteacher  
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Hertfordshire  
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Dear Mr Evans

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Martins Wood Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 21 March 2016, 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 October 2015. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that monitoring of the quality of teaching focuses more closely on outcomes for pupils over time rather than on observations of individual lessons
- increase the focus on identifying disadvantaged pupils who are capable of achieving the higher levels and provide appropriate support to enable them to do so
- improve the school's action plan by adding measurable success criteria so that governors are better able to hold leaders to account.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and I looked at a number of other school documents. You took me on a tour of the site and we observed teaching and learning throughout the school.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, two teachers have joined the school: one to replace a teacher who left at the end of the autumn term and another to enable one of the assistant headteachers to move into a non-class-based role. One governor left the governing body after the inspection. An election is currently underway to select a parent governor.

## **Main findings**

The school's leaders and governors were disappointed that the school was judged to require improvement when it was inspected in October 2015. However, you have accepted the judgement and made a prompt start to addressing the areas for improvement identified during the section 5 inspection.

The school's action plan has a number of strengths. It is described as 'our pathway to outstanding' and it is clear that you and the school's other leaders aspire to become an outstanding school. The plan tackles explicitly each of the areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection and includes a range of appropriate actions to achieve the targets set. It is clear that the plan is monitored and updated regularly.

Although the plan includes success criteria and statements of intended impact, these are not sharply focused enough for governors to use them to hold you to account. A lack of measurable criteria means that success is open to interpretation, and effective monitoring harder to achieve. For example, 'disadvantaged pupils are making at least good progress in all areas' leaves unanswered questions as to what proportion of disadvantaged pupils are expected to make good progress; what good progress is considered to be; and what 'all areas' means.

The last inspection took place early in the school year. As a result of the expanding school roll and vacancies occurring for a variety of reasons, 10 teachers had joined the school a month before the inspection, seven of them newly qualified. Now, over halfway through the school year, the teaching team is much better established and new staff are better acquainted with what you describe as 'the Martins Wood way'.

You have taken a number of actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning in phonics (the relationships between letters and sounds). A lead teacher is now in place with a particular brief to raise standards in this area of learning. Staff have

received training on teaching phonics and you have seen improvements as a result of this. You have reviewed the way pupils are grouped for phonics sessions and have found that pupils are making faster progress as a result of the changes made. The most recent assessments of the progress pupils are making show that a much higher proportion of Year 1 pupils are on track to meet the expected level than the 2015 national average.

At the time of the last inspection, 'Martins Wood time' had very recently been introduced. This initiative provides class teachers with an additional half day per week to work with individuals or small groups of pupils on specific areas of learning. This approach is now much better established and you are seeing better progress when pupils work with teachers in this way. You are aware that this initiative is expensive and that it must provide value for money in terms of improving outcomes for pupils.

'Martins Wood time' is being used to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils. An additional half day per week of individual and small-group teaching time is also now in place in each year group. You told me that disadvantaged pupils are now making more rapid progress, as a result of this additional targeted work with a qualified teacher, and a greater number are now reaching age-related expectations. It is important that you now also focus on identifying those disadvantaged pupils who are capable of reaching the higher levels in order that they are stretched and their aspirations raised.

You and the school's other leaders are focusing well on the need to improve the quality of teaching across the school. The assistant headteachers each know the staff and pupils in the phase they are responsible for because they observe teachers regularly and teach in each class. Although the school's senior leaders identify the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching they see, evaluation of the quality of teaching is limited because it focuses too much on observation and does not link closely enough with outcomes for pupils. As we discussed, it is important that leaders routinely look at the work that pupils produce and the standards they reach, as well as observations of what happens in lessons, in order to fully evaluate how good or otherwise the quality of teaching and learning is in a particular class or year group.

The governors have responded very positively to the judgement that the school requires improvement. They are fully aware that they need to provide greater challenge and to set the agenda in terms of their strategic leadership of the school. A review of governance took place during the latter part of the autumn term and it is commendable that all governors took part in the evaluation, each completing a self-audit. Governors now have their own action plan in response to the review and are well placed to improve their effectiveness and thereby raise the effectiveness of leadership and management.

## **External support**

The local authority is supporting the school well, particularly in terms of improving practice around assessment. For example, a local authority adviser has delivered training to the governors on the local authority's approach to assessment. Governors found this training to be extremely useful and, as a result, they now have greater knowledge and understanding of assessment and are better able to hold the school's leaders to account. The local authority responded promptly to the school's request for a review of governance.

A national leader of education from the local teaching school alliance has now been identified to work with you. An initial meeting has been held and her support for the school will begin imminently.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**