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Ian Smith  
Upper Arley CofE VC Primary School  
Arley  
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Dear Mr Smith

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Upper Arley CofE VC Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 2017, 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 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that pupils leave the Reception Year forming their letters correctly and that all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation across all subjects
- develop pupils' mathematical skills across a range of subjects
- ensure that the most able pupils are consistently challenged in mathematics
- monitor the progress of different groups of pupils in greater detail and report performance information more clearly to governors
- ensure that the school improvement plan contains more detailed timescales and measureable outcomes.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and two members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I conducted learning walks in all classes and spoke to pupils about their work. I looked at English and mathematics books from all year groups and the Reception children's learning journals. A range of documentation was reviewed, including information about pupils' achievement, minutes of governors' meetings, a range of school policies and monitoring records of teaching and learning. Prior to the inspection, the school's website was reviewed to check that it contained all of the required information.

## **Context**

There have been some teaching staff changes over the last academic year, and a further change is to be made in September 2017. Since January 2017, the leadership structure of the school has been strengthened, which is supporting school improvements. There have been some changes on the governing body and currently there are vacancies which are yet to be filled.

## **Main findings**

Since the last inspection, you have ensured that there has been a high priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. Regular checks on pupils' books have focused on improving the presentation of mathematics work, in particular the formation of numbers. Work in pupils' books reveals that teachers' expectations of presentation are much higher. There is little evidence of numbers being written incorrectly across the school and the majority of books are well presented, with calculations set out more methodically. You continue to monitor weaknesses to ensure that there is consistency of practice across the school.

A review of mathematics books also shows that teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in problem-solving and reasoning activities. Teachers are linking the problem-solving activities to the skills being taught more effectively. However, there needs to be a greater focus on ensuring that the most able pupils are provided with activities that are fully challenging to take their learning forward. While this is happening effectively in some years, it is not sufficiently consistent.

You have, rightly, focused on improving the quality of mathematics teaching in mathematics lessons. You have researched carefully different approaches to the teaching of mathematics, including visiting other schools to learn from best practice. This approach was taken to ensure that any new resources and teaching methods introduced have a positive impact on improving pupils' progress. There now needs

to be more emphasis on developing the application of pupils' mathematical skills in other subjects, such as science. You recognise that this shortcoming needs to be a focus for the next academic year.

The support of a local primary school has been effective in improving assessment in the early years. The early years teacher has been able to discuss and review different approaches to assess children's progress securely. Again, a careful and considered approach has been taken to decide which system best suits the needs of the school. While a final decision is yet to be made on the purchase of a commercial assessment system, there have been significant improvements to the school's own assessment systems. Children's learning journals are detailed and contain a wide range of information about what children are achieving across all areas of learning. The journals contain good evidence of children's progress during the Reception Year. They also demonstrate more challenge for the most able pupils, in particular more demanding number activities.

While significant improvements have been made in many aspects of the early years provision, there needs to be much more emphasis on developing children's ability to form their letters correctly. Work in children's books shows that the majority are not forming letters correctly by the end of the Reception Year. This impacts greatly on their ability to develop their handwriting skills in key stages 1 and 2. Work in pupils' English books from Years 1 to 4 shows that pupils are continuing to form letters incorrectly and that their handwriting skills are poor. There is also too much work which is of an unacceptable standard of presentation across these year groups. You recognise that this weakness must be addressed more effectively next academic year.

You gather detailed information about individual pupils' attainment and the progress they are making over time. Half-termly pupil progress meetings discuss how well pupils are achieving and whether any additional support is needed to help them make better progress. Your analysis of the progress of different groups of pupils, such as pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is developing; however, you recognise that there is further work to be done to improve the tracking of pupils' attainment and progress. While governors receive detailed information about pupils' progress, the way in which it is presented needs to be more precise to enable them to fully understand the key strengths in pupils' performance and areas for development in order to hold you and your leaders to account for school outcomes.

You and the governors have welcomed and embraced all support to improve the school. The local authority undertook a review of governance in February 2017. This review highlighted a number of strengths in governance, not least the strong and open working relationship between you and the governors. The review also gave governors a clear overview of how to improve their effectiveness. Considerable improvements have been made in the way governors monitor the school's performance. For example, the governors' visits policy has been rewritten and visits

now focus more sharply on whether school development actions are leading to improvements.

Governors have reflected carefully on whether some of the changes made since the review have been successful. A review of the minutes of the full governing body shows that governors have not focused sufficiently on how well pupils are doing during their meetings. This is because there is too much other information, such as finance and premises matters, which take up discussion time. Governors recognise this and are in the process of reviewing their committee structure and ways of working to ensure that there is a key focus on monitoring pupils' progress and attainment during every governor meeting.

Following the last inspection, you took swift action to rewrite the school development plan. The development plan is suitably focused on the key aspects which need to be tackled to improve the quality of education provided. However, some parts of the plan lack clarity about the outcomes you expect to see as a result of the improvement actions taken. This means governors are not able to hold leaders to account fully. You recognise this and are refining the development plan for the next academic year to ensure that everyone is clear about what outcomes are expected and the timescales to be achieved.

### **External support**

The local authority is providing the school with a comprehensive range of appropriate support. It is being embraced by both you and the governing body and, as a result, the school is making steady improvements. A review of governance was conducted by local authority advisers and clearly identified the strengths of the governing body, but also where further developments were needed. Governors have acted on this advice and some clear improvements in governor effectiveness are evident. The local authority has enabled the school to become part of the Kidderminster key priority area project. This is helping to improve the effectiveness of leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and work. The local authority brokered the support of another school to help leaders develop more effective early years assessment. This has been particularly successful in determining children's progress over time. Advisers have visited the school to review the teaching of mathematics and valuable advice and support has resulted in improvements in this subject. However, the local authority recognises that there is more to be done to further raise the challenge for the most able in mathematics. The local authority has also identified the need to improve pupils' handwriting and presentation skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education

for the Diocese of Worcester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**