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Mrs Lucy Wass  
Headteacher  
Holt Farm Junior School  
Ashingdon  
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Dear Mrs Wass

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holt Farm Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 November 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. The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' understanding of the different groups, faiths and cultures found in modern Britain
- ensure that staff teaching all age groups have the skills to identify weaknesses in pupils' reading and help them to improve.

### **Evidence**

During the visit I held meetings with you, other leaders, the chair and two members of the local governing body, pupils, a representative of Essex local authority and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust (MAT) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Together, you and I made short visits to all classes in the school. I evaluated your school action plans and checked your records of lesson observations, and files relating to performance management.

## **Main findings**

The November 2016 section 5 inspection took place when you had been the headteacher for only a few weeks. The summer 2017 national test results demonstrated the clear improvement during the academic year for which you have been in charge. In these tests, pupils' attainment was above average for reading, writing and mathematics combined. Pupils attained especially, well in mathematics. Pupils' progress from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 was above average in reading and writing and well above average in mathematics. Impressively, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was above that for all pupils nationally.

At the November 2016 inspection, leaders were asked to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Since the inspection there has been considerable training to raise the quality of teaching, including visits to see best practice in other schools. The impact of this can be seen in classrooms, where there is a remarkable level of consistency in teaching quality. You have established an effective programme of lessons observations and use a wide range of evidence to monitor the quality of teaching. Your evidence from scrutiny of work, lesson observations, short drop-ins and your analysis of assessment information indicate that teaching and learning is much stronger than at the time of the inspection and that inadequate teaching and learning has been eliminated. Pupils told me that teaching is better than it used to be and that they are helped to improve their work. As I toured classrooms with you it was obvious that teachers are skilful in checking pupils' knowledge and understanding and in helping them to improve their work.

The November 2016 inspection report asked you to improve pupils' behaviour. Around the school and in lessons, pupils get on well together. They cooperate with one another and help each other to learn. In lessons, very productive working relationships are evident. There is very strong evidence of positive improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning. As I toured classrooms with you, it was apparent that teachers have high expectations of pupils' abilities, presentation of their work and their behaviour.

Finally, you were asked to strengthen leadership and management. You now have an effective senior team, including a deputy headteacher appointed since the inspection. The skills of the leaders complement one another well so that, for example, your expertise in mathematics is matched by the deputy's specialism in English. As you were asked, you have commissioned an external review of your use of pupil premium funding to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, you have better identified and addressed the barriers to learning for these. The local governing body has relevant expertise and challenges the school very well. You have worked hard to engage parents better and your survey of parents' views shows that they are very positive about all aspects of the school and your leadership.

Overall, there is clear evidence of rapid improvement through passionate and determined leadership. The key areas of relative weakness that emerged during my

visits were firstly that pupils are not as skilled in reading as they are in mathematics. You are working well to instil a love of reading. However, possibly because pupils start your school in key stage 2 and because of the legacy of poor performance in the past, some pupils have gaps in basic reading skills. Additionally, while pupils are very accepting of difference, you recognise that they do not have a strong understanding of diversity and the different cultures to be found in modern Britain.

I may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

Your school receives support from other schools in the MAT. You share best practice and some leadership resources with other schools in the MAT. The local authority representative has also been helping you. You have been proactive in sending your staff to observe best practice in other schools.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of South East Essex Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**