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22 January 2018

Mrs Sarah Winter  
Headteacher  
South Hill Primary School  
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Hertfordshire  
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Dear Mrs Winter

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to South Hill Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 January 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- the progress of middle-ability pupils is accelerated so that they achieve as well as they are able
- the teaching of mathematics improves across the school so that pupils' progress is at least in line with that in reading and writing.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, 10 pupils from key stage 2, the chair of the governing body and six other governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. You,

your deputy headteacher and I observed learning throughout the school, spoke to pupils during their lessons and looked at the work of the most able key stage 2 pupils in their English, mathematics, topic and science books. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document, records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment information and records of performance management of staff. I took into account the school's own survey of parents' views, notes of visits from the local authority and minutes of governing body meetings. Together, we scrutinised checks the school makes on the suitability of adults to work with children and also the school's safeguarding arrangements.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, there have been a considerable number of changes to the school, the leadership team, governors and staff. You took up your role as headteacher in April 2017 following a comprehensive handover from the second of two interim headteachers. Several members of staff have been on maternity leave, some of whom have just returned, and many new members of staff have been appointed. The governing body is unrecognisable from that which was in place at the previous inspection. The new chair of the governing body, appointed through the local authority, is a national leader of governance. She has been instrumental in supporting the relatively new members of the governing body in their understanding of the school's previous and current position.

Governors have supported the recent changes to the structure of the senior leadership team, which now includes an additional acting position of assistant headteacher for key stage 2. This, and the changes you have made to the roles within the senior leadership team, has added to the capacity for further improvement. The continual growth as a two-form entry school has also had an impact on many aspects of the school's work. The school is now larger than at the time of the previous inspection, with the only single year groups being in Years 5 and 6. The pupil intake has changed considerably since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has grown.

## **Main findings**

Leaders' plans and actions in response to the section 5 inspection have been thoughtful, well planned and thorough. Consequently, improvement is evident in all areas identified as needing attention in the previous inspection report. School leaders and governors know the school well and have identified its strengths and areas for future development.

Governance has been strengthened considerably since the previous inspection. Alongside the local authority, the new chair of the governing body has worked tirelessly with her relatively inexperienced team of governors to ensure that all governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The

most important feature of their work has been to appoint you as substantive headteacher at a time when the school had undergone considerable changes, including three changes in headteacher. Parents are clearly appreciative of the new leadership. All of those who completed the school's own survey said they would recommend the school to another parent. Governors now work very closely with you and the senior leaders to ensure that they are well placed to question and challenge leaders. This is evident in the minutes of governing body meetings and is something you and other leaders welcome. Information in your report to governors is fulsome.

Leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough. Leaders revisited and modified the school's behaviour management policy in the summer term 2017. As a result, pupils are much more ready to learn and, as pupils told me, 'Behaviour is good most of the time and when it isn't, it is sorted out quickly.' Leaders have recorded well the impact of the new behaviour policy on learning, particularly where there have been staff changes. Leaders regularly observe lessons, conduct learning walks and scrutinise pupils' work. They check that teachers' assessments are accurate, holding regular meetings with members of staff about the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. Sensibly, leaders also moderate teachers' assessments of pupils' work with other schools. Teachers are provided with regular feedback about their work, embracing these opportunities to improve their practice. The impact of the support of the local authority advisers on individual teachers' practice has undoubtedly secured improvement, and continues to do so. As a result, and due to recruitment of new members of staff, the quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection.

The learning observed in lessons during the inspection showed that teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers regularly check on pupils' understanding of what they are learning. The work set by teachers is challenging for the majority of pupils, including the most able. In the majority of classes pupils select the level of challenge they feel they are capable of. This is actively encouraged by all adults. Numerous examples of pupils celebrating their move to the next challenge were clearly audible, with some pupils punching the air with excitement, clearly proud of their achievement. Pupils take risks and know 'we are learning when we make mistakes'. However, in some classes and year groups, middle-ability pupils could be challenged more so that they make even better progress.

Pupils are well supported by all adults in the vast majority of classes. Despite there being many changes to staffing as recently as three days prior to the inspection, pupils are all engaged in their learning. Teaching assistants, a few of whom are the 'constants' in the classes where changes to teachers have been unavoidable, know the pupils well and ably support the newer members of staff. We saw many examples of effective use of teaching assistants leading small groups of pupils, for example in phonics, mathematics and writing. As a result of the school's policy of

'over-the-shoulder marking', teachers regularly challenge pupils with well-placed questions about their work. Pupils enthusiastically take up the challenge.

Published results for 2017 were very positive. At the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment improved from 2016 where it was below the national average to above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion who achieved the higher standard also rose from 2016. Results for pupils at the end of key stage 1, however, took a dip. Pupils attained in line with the national average in reading, but below in writing and mathematics. However, progress in all three areas was good from pupils' starting points. The proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth rose in reading and writing to be broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 was also in line with the national average. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of the early years improved considerably.

Leaders track pupils' progress meticulously, regularly intervening with individual and group plans to address identified gaps in pupils' and individuals' learning. The school's own evidence in books and teachers' assessments show that the progress of current pupils across the school is improving in reading, writing and mathematics. What is more, the proportion of pupils working at age-related expectations is rising across key stage 2. However, it is slower in mathematics, which lags behind reading and writing. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged are making better progress than their peers. This is because the support they receive through effective use of the additional funding is bespoke, involving, for example, such provision as counselling or welfare support.

The quality of writing from Years 4 to 6 is very impressive. Pupils are now encouraged to reflect on their work and edit it to improve, for example, vocabulary, punctuation or content. Writing either linked to curricular themes like the Second World War or when produced in English lessons is of equally good quality. Pupils are very aware of the audience for whom they are writing and use a lot of their reading experience in their writing, to very good effect.

Work to ensure that problem-solving, reasoning and mastery in mathematics is of a consistently high standard is at the early stages of development. Evidence of pupils debating, for example, about which way they prefer to solve problems and why is becoming more commonplace. Articulate pupils, in some classes, explain their workings-out. As a result, most-able pupils in particular are making more rapid progress and are confident about tackling anything 'tricky' with relish.

Leaders have done considerable work to ensure that the new creative curriculum is embedded throughout the school. You are passionate about providing high-quality school experiences that pupils might otherwise not get. Pupils' 'passports' will eventually include a visit to the ballet, hearing a live orchestra, visiting the theatre to see a play, and going to an art gallery. This passion is undoubtedly spreading to the

pupils. They are very enthusiastic about music, art and physical education lessons in particular. The school's additional funding for sport and disadvantaged pupils is being used very effectively. All pupils learn to play the ukulele and many take up individual music lessons, which they clearly enjoy. One pupil I spoke to wants to be a professional musician upon leaving school.

Pupils enjoy the many trips that teachers arrange for them, including to the Royal Air Force Museum or a local Celtic village. The school's walls are adorned with high-quality displays of pupils' work from the exciting themes that teachers plan. The curriculum is rich with experiences through themes like 'habitats', 'heroes', 'fair trade' (on the 'chocolate day'), or exploring the local town. Pupils say they like to have visitors to the school and particularly look forward to the 'mad science club'. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were very clear that they could do anything they wanted to do when they leave school. Their high aspirations include being an author, doctor, chef, artist or sports professional.

### **External support**

From the point that the school received its requires improvement judgement, the local authority has supported leaders to improve the outcomes of pupils at South Hill. The local authority brokered a national leader of governance and supported the school in recruiting and training new and existing governors. Leaders and governors have continued to draw effectively on a considerable programme of consultant support for early years, mathematics and subject leadership. Following positive work with leaders and governors and the encouraging pupil outcomes in 2017, the school is no longer requiring the level of support from the local authority that it has had. However, leaders and governors are committed to continue to work with the local authority, local schools and the community.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**