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Mr Andrew Bunyan
Strategic Director of Children & Young
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Dear Andrew

Derby City LA – focused inspections – 17 to 23 January 2013

Thank you for our meeting on 16 January 2013. It was a good opportunity to introduce myself as the interim Regional Director for the East Midlands, to meet you and your senior team, and to discuss Ofsted's new regional structure and how we might work together to further improve Derby's schools.

Our meeting was also helpful for me to be able to explain the current approach Ofsted is taking with schools in particular local authority areas in focusing our inspection activity into a concentrated period. This approach, coupled with the outcomes of a telephone survey of a sample of school leaders about their perception of the support and challenge provided by the local authority, enables us to obtain a clearer picture of the education provided for children and young people in those areas.

As I explained I would at our meeting, I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the school inspections and the survey carried out during the focused week for Derby City in the period 17 to 23 January 2013.

Outline of inspection activities

Ten schools were inspected during the focused inspection week, including: one nursery school; five primary schools; two junior schools; one secondary school; and one special school. Seven of these were judged to be satisfactory at their last inspection, two were found to be good (including the nursery) and the special school was outstanding. These were selected randomly for this exercise as a sample of schools from all those due for inspection by the end of this academic year.

During the inspections Her Majesty's Inspectors gathered information on the use, quality and impact of local authority support for school improvement by asking three additional key questions of headteachers and governors:

- How well does the local authority know your school, your performance and the standards your pupils achieve?
- What measures are in place to support and challenge your school and how do these meet the needs of your school?
- What is the impact of the local authority support and challenge over time to help your school improve?

A further 12 schools were surveyed by telephone during the focused inspection week. These included six primary schools, two nursery schools, three secondary schools (two of which are academies) and one special school. The schools were selected randomly from the city's good and outstanding schools; five were outstanding and seven were judged to be good at their last inspection. Headteachers in these schools were asked the same three questions and a fourth, which reflected their status as good or outstanding schools:

- How well is the local authority making use of your school's strengths to help others improve?

Inspection and survey outcomes

Of the schools inspected during the focused inspection week:

- six were graded as good for overall effectiveness. Four of these schools had improved since their previous inspection and two had sustained their overall good judgement
- three were judged to require improvement. All were graded as satisfactory at the previous inspection, so none of these schools have improved significantly, including the secondary school
- the special school sustained the outstanding judgement awarded at its previous inspection.

The improvement of just over half the schools previously judged satisfactory gives cause for optimism and reflects well upon the hard work of the senior leaders, teachers and pupils since their last inspection. To balance this, it remains of concern that three of the previously satisfactory schools have not improved their inspection grade and so the pupils continue to not have access to a good quality of education.

Responses to the key questions asked of those schools inspected during the week and those contacted by telephone were analysed. The key findings are outlined below.

Strengths

- Some effective examples were provided through the inspections and telephone survey about how the local authority has supported schools, but there were fewer examples of effective challenge over time.
- Recent developments in the way the local authority exercises its duty to promote high standards of education for its children and young people have improved the rigour of challenge from school improvement officers, within what some schools perceive to be limited resources. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact on driving improvement.
- Performance data and other information are used well to provide challenge by those school improvement officers who have established strong partnerships with schools over time.
- Support and training for governors provided by the local authority appears to be strong and most feedback is positive.
- Developing partnerships between the local authority and local networks of schools hold promise for the future in driving improvement. Headteachers provided several examples of more recent occasions when the local authority has been proactive in brokering support and in trying to develop the Local Leaders of Education scheme.

Areas for improvement

- The survey responses suggest that schools do not have a clear and consistent understanding of the local authority's vision for school improvement across the city, despite the authority's efforts to promote the 'Derby Winners' initiative.
- Strategies to evaluate the impact of local authority challenge and support for schools are underdeveloped. Schools are not clear whether there are shared criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the support and challenge provided.
- Relationships between schools and school improvement officers are inconsistent in their effectiveness and frequent changes in local authority officers over time have had a limiting effect on the impact of the support and challenge provided for some schools.
- Although schools report that performance data are used in conversations between local authority officers and school leaders, there is not always a sharp enough focus on the performance of specific groups of pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Opportunities are also missed

to gather evidence about the quality of provision in nursery schools to establish baselines for measuring progress in the longer term.

- The quality of Human Resources support from the local authority is variable. Some schools see it as ineffective and have sourced external support, for example, to manage staff underperformance.
- School leaders perceive that the local authority has not taken a consistent lead in using the identified strengths in schools to help others to improve. They report that the partnerships they have established independently within school network groups are having a greater impact on improvement than the support and challenge provided by the local authority.

In summary, while there was a general perception that the support and challenge provided to schools by the local authority had improved in the last year or so, there is still much work to do in establishing and embedding a clear, strategic vision for school improvement that will lead to sustained and demonstrable impact across the city's schools.

I hope these observations are useful as you seek to improve further the quality of education for the children and young people of Derby.

Please pass on my thanks to the headteachers, governors and local authority officers who gave their time to talk to our inspectors during the focused inspection week. Please also do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss anything in this letter further.

Yours sincerely



Sean Harford HMI
Interim Regional Director, East Midlands

CC Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education