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28 January 2020

Miss Helen Emmett  
Headteacher  
Heron Park Primary Academy  
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East Sussex  
BN22 9EE

Dear Miss Emmett

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heron Park Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- improve leadership at all levels, particularly that of the new subject leaders, ensuring that they have a clear understanding of their role and are given the training and support to do it
- ensure that all curriculum areas are coherently planned and sequenced so that pupils build their knowledge and skills in a systematic way
- refine the school improvement plan to indicate more precisely the desired impact for pupils and timescales for completion.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior and subject leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer (CEO), the director of education from the trust and members of the local academy board (LAB), including the chair of the LAB, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan.

In addition, I made short visits to every class with a senior leader. I met with pupils and looked at their work. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I also scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's single central record.

## **Context**

At the time of the last inspection in September 2018, the headteacher had been in post for a few days. Since that inspection, there has continued to be turbulence in staffing. There is a new lead for early years, two staff have been appointed as assistant headteachers, and a senior leader has been seconded from another school to support the headteacher. The deputy headteacher has been absent from the school for some time. The trust's director of education currently supports the school and will take up the role of executive headteacher when the headteacher's maternity leave commences.

## **Main findings**

Leaders from the trust are well aware that previous actions intended to bring about improvement did not make the needed changes. Working closely with the headteacher and external experts, they have carefully examined what went wrong. They recognise that they have to do things differently in order to improve the school. All now have a secure understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to improve it. Together, leaders from the school and the trust have set about making these changes in a systematic and logical way. There are clear signs of improvement, especially lower down the school, but the quality of education is not yet as secure for upper year groups.

The early years provision has been transformed. Children enjoy a wide range of activities that prepare them well for Year 1. The new leader has developed the curriculum well. Staff aim to develop a love of reading from the word go. Their use of 'featured authors' helps children to grow in confidence when listening to stories, and to feel like experts when discussing them.

Leaders have ensured that all staff follow the phonics programme exactly. This is making a difference. Leaders have invested in staff training and have monitored teaching closely to ensure that staff expertise is secure. Staff are positive about this support. They use assessment well to check what pupils know and address

identified needs quickly and effectively. Pupils in the younger year groups are developing their early reading skills well.

Further up the school, there remain gaps in pupils' basic reading skills. Leaders have adopted a variety of well-considered actions to address these. They understand the urgency with which these gaps need to be filled. They make good use of a commercial scheme to address phonics gaps. However, staff knowledge of how pupils develop early reading skills is not as secure as in the lower years. Consequently, the quality of this and other work to improve pupils' reading is not as strong as it is lower in the school. Leaders know exactly what needs to be done. They are providing ongoing support and training for staff. However, older pupils do not currently make the progress through the reading curriculum that leaders intend.

It is a similar situation with mathematics. Leaders have addressed weaknesses with the mathematics curriculum. Once again, they have provided high-quality training for staff. However, older pupils have a legacy of low standards. They are still working on learning that they should have acquired in previous years. Leaders recognise this, but it is not clear that all class teachers understand the urgency of the work to address it. In part, this is because improvement plans are not clear enough about the intended outcomes and timescales for actions.

Leaders are now developing the whole curriculum. Subject leaders have been appointed to coordinate this work. Some subjects, such as science, are more advanced than others. Some subject leaders are very recently appointed and do not yet have a clear understanding of their role. Leaders are drawing on the wide resource of the trust to support staff, but this is another example of work that needs to be secured.

The CEO and the director of education from the trust have supported the school closely. The CEO has stepped up his scrutiny of leaders' work to ensure that there is secure evidence for leaders' assurances. In turn, the CEO receives robust challenge from the trust board. Minutes of their meetings show all recognise the priority of improving this school.

The LAB retains the same chairperson. She is undertaking training and recognises the need to increase challenge when holding leaders to account. Other members of the LAB have changed. New members bring useful expertise with them and also recognise the need to provide challenge as well as support.

Pupils are happy at the school. They are proud of their work and behave well. They say that bullying is not an issue but that their learning is 'sometimes' disrupted by others who are 'having a bad day'. They have total confidence in their teachers, particularly their headteacher.

The small group of parents and carers that I spoke to were positive overall. Most spoke of improved communication and said that their children were happy and felt safe at Heron Park.

The determination to improve this school is palpable. There is still much to do, and leaders know this. Their improvement plans are well considered, and the changes established so far show promise. The trust has ensured that there is the capacity to sustain and build on this work.

### **External support**

The school is drawing on various sources of external support, including from another multi-academy trust, brokered by the local authority. This is helping them to see their work through different eyes and try new ways of addressing the weaknesses. This appears to have been of use.

As directed at the last inspection, leaders have commissioned an external review of the use of the pupil premium. They have acted on the recommendations, but the impact for pupils is yet to be seen.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the trust board, the chief executive officer of the multi academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English

**Her Majesty's Inspector**