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Deborah Fance  
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Dear Ms Fance

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heath Mount Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 29 June 2021, 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(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.**

The school should take further action to:

- provide foundation subject leaders with more training and support to guide them in their leadership roles

- check that updated curriculum plans in several foundation subjects are implemented consistently across the school and lead to pupils knowing and remembering more over time
- ensure that pupils are guided to use the most efficient methods in mathematics as soon as they have the knowledge to do so
- make sure that early years and key stage 1 staff use language precisely and accurately and pay more attention to correcting children's early pencil hold and letter formation
- ensure the new senior leadership team articulates the school's improvement priorities with greater clarity.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection in June 2019, there have been several staff changes. Three teachers have left. One new teacher has been appointed and some temporary staff have been employed. The assistant headteacher has been appointed as the permanent deputy headteacher. Two new assistant headteachers were appointed in spring 2021. A new governing body is in place.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection, leadership at different levels in the school has improved. The appointment of a permanent deputy headteacher and two new assistant headteachers has strengthened the school's capacity for further improvement. Curriculum planning has been updated and expectations for staff and pupils have risen. However, there is still more to do to ensure that these recent changes lead to long-term improvements.

Staff changes in key stage 1 have interrupted the pace of improvement in this part of the school. On top of this, the disruption caused by COVID-19 has also brought some delays to planned improvement actions. That said, staff managed the school's remote education offer very well. In their comments on Ofsted Parent View, many parents praised the school's work to provide education during periods of partial closure.

The leadership of reading presents an encouraging picture. In this area of learning, school leaders are very clear about what they are doing and why. There is now a highly structured programme in place for teaching early reading, which is supported by staff training and resources. In all classes, staff use the agreed approach precisely and accurately. This is evidently bringing benefits. Early reading activities are linked with spelling and handwriting, and children have phonically decodable books that they can take home. However, not enough attention is given to early pencil grip and letter formation. In addition, some staff do not use spoken language

as well as they might. These aspects need to improve so that pupils do not get into bad habits that are hard to shift.

Curriculum plans in mathematics have also improved. Staff know what to teach and when, and ensure that lessons follow on logically from what has gone before. Furthermore, staff routinely check that pupils have remembered earlier teaching before they move on to something new. Leadership of mathematics is informed, supportive and ambitious for further improvement. To this end, a key priority is to make sure that, when pupils are learning different methods for working out calculations or solving problems, they learn the most efficient methods as soon as they are ready. Doing this will help them to cope with more complicated work in the future.

In most other subjects, curriculum plans have been reviewed and revised. In doing this, subject leaders have been attentive to the progression of knowledge from one year to the next. Understandably, the disruption caused by COVID-19 has delayed the implementation of some plans. However, leaders and staff are now pressing on with them. Looking ahead, subject leaders intend to check on how well this updated curriculum planning is working in different classes. Training and guidance to support them in these monitoring roles will be important.

In a similar vein, senior leadership, which has strengthened considerably, would also benefit from some challenge and guidance to build greater clarity and coherence. Currently, the long-term school development plan is very wordy. The ambitious statements have not been translated into specific actions. It needs to be simplified. Senior leaders are doing the right things and improving the school. However, some of their messages do not come across as well as they might.

Governance is heading in the right direction. Governors with specific expertise have been recruited and there is now a full complement of governors. They have created new committees, which receive regular reports from school leaders. These, along with other sources of information, enable them to bring increased levels of scrutiny and challenge to the school's work and performance. Recently, the governors initiated an external review of their work. This is indicative of their evaluative approach and drive to improve the rigour of their oversight.

### **Additional support**

The school has continued to receive regular support brokered through the local authority. Leaders and staff value this support and act upon the recommendations made.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, staff, pupils, a school improvement partner commissioned by the local authority, and three governors, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I looked at school improvement plans, curriculum plans and records of external support. I visited lessons, observed pupils reading and talked to staff and pupils about teaching, learning, leadership and safeguarding. I took account of the 24 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 51 responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire. This included 46 free-text comments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**