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Mr Kevin King  
The Headteacher  
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25 January 2007

Dear Mr King

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HURST HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Mr Mutton and Mr Grove, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 January 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

### Context

There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team since the previous visit. The substantive headteacher resigned in September 2006 and the school was led by an acting headteacher until December 2006. A new headteacher has been in post since 3 January 2007.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards remain inadequate overall. Results in the 2006 Year 6 tests remain well below the national averages although moderately better than they were in 2005. Nevertheless, given their starting points, the pupils' achievement remains exceptionally low in English, mathematics, and science. This is not the case in Key Stage 1 where results in the 2006 tests for Year 2 continue to improve. They are now above the national averages in reading and writing and in line in mathematics with pupils making satisfactory progress from the Foundation Stage.

The pupils' achievement over time is inconsistent within and across year groups in Key Stage 2. Although standards have improved slightly in Year 6, in other year groups they have not and remain exceptionally low particularly in Year 3. Standards in many year groups are not rising quickly enough with too much being left until Year 6. This is because too many teachers are not getting to grips with assessing pupils' current abilities and identifying gaps in learning in order to plan work that meets pupils' needs. Despite the improvements in the school's results, the progress that the pupils make in too many lessons is currently inadequate. Further evidence from the pupils' books in Years 3 to 6 indicates that many teachers' expectations are too low. The quality of presentation, punctuation, and spelling is variable, as is the progress of higher attaining pupils because the work does not match their needs and therefore provides insufficient challenge.

## Personal development and well-being

Most pupils have sustained good attitudes to their learning. They want to do their best to work hard and learn even when lessons are mundane and lack challenge. Behaviour is good in most lessons and around the school. The pupils are becoming more involved in their own learning by reflecting on what they have learned but this is inconsistent across the classes and year groups. Some pupils are beginning to demonstrate how they evaluate their own learning. Some classes use the 'traffic light' system where red, yellow and green indicate different levels of understanding. Elsewhere, use is made of an informal 'thumbs up or down' system. The pupils like the rewards that they receive in recognition of the efforts to meet their targets. This clearly motivates some pupils, especially in Years 4 and 6, to strive harder for success.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate. Too few lessons in Years 3 to 6 ensure that pupils make the progress needed to overcome their previous underachievement. The planning for pupils of different abilities remains inconsistent. This is because the data about pupils' past performance and future targets is still not used well enough to ensure that pupils are challenged and supported as much as they should be in lessons. This is

particularly the case for the higher attaining pupils. Crucially, the gap between what these pupils should be attaining, and what they are actually achieving, remains too wide.

The introduction of targets for all pupils evident in the visit in May 2006 was an important step forward in improving progress and raising standards. Systems are now in place to give teachers all the information they require to assess pupils accurately and move them effectively through the National Curriculum levels. For example, the next steps approach to pupils' self-assessment in reading and writing, level ladders, and the intensifying support programme are evident in all classrooms. However, teachers are not using these support systems as effectively as they could in many classes and this constrains the progress the pupils make, and takes away much of the benefit of giving pupils targets. The very recently introduced marking policy rightly expects teachers to judge how well the pupils have learned and to point out the next steps for them. However, where teaching is weak plans are not adapted for the next day even when it is evident that pupils have grasped what they have been taught. Consequently, pupils do not move on through the curriculum quickly enough and therefore make inadequate progress.

During the introductions to lessons, teachers discuss with the pupils what they are going to learn through a satisfactory recapitulation of work completed in previous lessons. This allows pupils to revise and link their prior learning to the new work. However, most teachers are not using the agreed systems in place at the time of the previous monitoring visit to give clear guidance as to how the pupils will know when they have succeeded. This means that some pupils are unsure about what they are expected to learn in the lesson or how their successes will be evaluated. As a result, some pupils are not sufficiently helped to focus on what they are learning and so find it difficult to assess their own progress by the ends of lessons.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- involve the children more in assessing their own work and setting targets for improvement – satisfactory
- improve the management systems for tracking the progress of the children as they move through the school and ensure that decisive action is taken where progress is not good enough – satisfactory
- raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, but particularly at the end of Key Stage 2 by improving all aspects of assessment to ensure the teachers plan lessons that provide work at the right level for children of all abilities – inadequate.

## Leadership and management

Since his appointment in January 2007, the new headteacher has got to know the school's strengths and weaknesses quickly. He has swiftly gained the confidence of both staff and pupils. There remain marked weaknesses in the

school's leadership. The senior and middle leaders have not ensured that improvements to the school's systems have a sufficient impact. There is insufficient systematic monitoring to check that policies are being carried out and too little evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's work. Although there is a programme of lesson observations it does not place sufficient emphasis on how well pupils are learning and how the teaching brings this about. The judgements following lesson observations lack detail and teachers are not given clear enough guidance to enable them to improve. Importantly, lesson observations are carried out too infrequently and therefore there is insufficient knowledge about the overall strengths and weakness in teaching. Consequently, actions to bring about rapid and sustained improvement have not been sufficiently robust or concerted. Similarly, frequent scrutiny of pupils' exercise books has not yet been undertaken. The lack of progress over time and the inconsistencies of practice across the school indicate that there is a considerable amount of work still to be done in this area.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- improve the overall quality of teaching by setting clear expectations of what the school wants to see happening in classrooms and establish robust systems to check that all staff are following guidelines – inadequate.

#### External support

The local authority has successfully supported the school in resolving short and long term staffing difficulties. The LA has focused its efforts on rebuilding a leadership team and giving guidance on how to provide strategic leadership. Appropriate support has been provided with the school welcoming the advice from literacy and numeracy consultants. However, the school has been slow to make effective use of some of the support offered, especially in evaluating the impact of actions designed to raise standards. The school would benefit from more frequent monitoring from the LA to ensure that the school is fully utilising the support provided.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the consistency and rigour of monitoring teaching and learning so that teachers are clear about areas for development.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
H M Inspector