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8 July 2008

Mrs Sandra Baxter  
Acting Executive Headteacher  
Hillcross Primary School  
Ashridge Way  
Morden  
SM4 4EE

Dear Mrs Baxter

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HILLCROSS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ann Sydney, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 July 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to discussion with the monitoring HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the IEB and the Head of School Improvement at Merton Council.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HILLCROSS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 2 July 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other school staff, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), groups of pupils, and talked informally with parents.

### Context

The substantive headteacher has been absent due to long-term illness since September 2007. Since the school was placed into special measures an executive headteacher has been appointed, and the LA has replaced the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB). These two events have been the catalyst for the improvements set out in this letter. This is now a school clearly moving in the right direction; not least because the executive headteacher and the chair of the IEB have secured the commitment and enthusiasm of key staff. There is clearly more to do, particularly at Key Stage 2, but this is now becoming a school that parents and the local community can have confidence in.

A significant number of staff, mainly Key Stage 2 teachers, are leaving at the end of the summer term. As a consequence, and as this visit took place late in the summer term, it was agreed that their lessons would not be formally observed.

### Achievement and standards

Children begin school with the expected skills and understanding for their age. At the previous inspection progress was judged to be inadequate because pupils did not maintain the excellent start they made in the Foundation Stage. As a result Key Stage 1 results in 2007 were exceptionally low when compared to national expectations.

At the time of this monitoring visit the school had recently completed the 2008 Key Stage 1 tests. The results have been externally moderated but were unvalidated. They demonstrate a significant improvement over the 2007 results. About a third of pupils are likely to achieve one level higher in reading and mathematics than national expectations. This represents good progress. Results in writing also appear to have improved from the very low results last year, but only about a tenth of pupils achieve the higher level. Considering their starting points this represents satisfactory progress in writing. Overall, this suggests that progress for the current Year 2 is good. Evidence from lesson observations during this visit supports that judgement. The school rightly attributes this to a very successful re-deployment of teaching staff and more effective use of assessment data.

As the school acknowledges outcomes at Key Stage 2 are not as good. The school's own monitoring suggests that standards will be similar to those typically found

nationally. This will represent, at best, satisfactory progress. However, assessment procedures at Key Stage 2 are not as secure as at Key Stage 1, so the school cannot be confident about the accuracy of its expectations. If the school were to achieve its predicted results it would meet the agreed Key Stage 2 targets. However, these targets, which were set in autumn 2006, are not challenging enough and only indicate satisfactory achievement. The school has established that progress for the current Year 5 is inadequate. This demonstrates that pupils are not building on the very good start that most enjoy in the Nursery and Reception classes. The school recognises this. As a result, there are good plans in place to reorganise pupils as they move into Year 6 and deploy senior staff to provide greater support. This model has worked successfully in Key Stage 1, and is a clear example of the school's more accurate self-evaluation and greater capacity to bring about improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Make sure that leaders at all levels work rigorously to improve achievement and standards, especially in mathematics and English – satisfactory

#### Personal development and well-being

There has been a significant change to pupils' behaviour around the school since the school was placed in special measures. Hillcross now looks, sounds and feels like a happy place. During extensive observation throughout the monitoring visit no incidents of poor behaviour were seen. Conversations with both parents and pupils confirmed this positive picture. At both break and lunch time pupils were having fun, playing safely and getting on very well with both each other and adults. This is largely as a direct result of two key actions: the institution of a clear system of rewards and sanctions which pupils accept and understand, and the training of mid-day supervisors. They now monitor groups of children effectively in playing games as well as supporting those with specific learning or behavioural needs. Adults and pupils alike now know their roles, responsibilities and boundaries. As a result children clearly feel safer and happier, and some teachers report that this has had a positive impact in the classroom.

Staff have received good training in behaviour management and as a result incidents of bullying have dropped significantly. The targeted support for specific pupils has been highly effective. Pupils are very supportive of all these changes. They particularly like the many sporting activities and games on offer at lunch times. A Year 3 pupil told an inspector, 'I always feel excited when I come to school'. Pupils were adamant that bullying is now no longer an issue and that any issues are dealt with effectively. The school intends to record and monitor more closely any incidents that do arise to ensure that this good start is maintained.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Deal with instances of bullying quickly and effectively and improve pupils' behaviour when they are outside lessons, so that all pupils are happy to come to school – good

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains satisfactory. Some teachers are planning more exciting and well paced lessons which motivate and enthuse pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1. For example, an outstanding Year 2 lesson stimulated pupils to make excellent progress and encouraged them to make creative connections between literacy, music and art. Teachers emphasise vocabulary and the basics of grammar and as a result the quality of writing is improving. Behaviour in class is good, pupils are attentive and keen to be involved and work well with their partner or group, even in the more demanding classes. Most pupils know their targets and what level they are achieving, and there are some good examples of marking.

The good teaching seen in Key Stage 1 continues at the start of Key Stage 2. Consequently, pupils continue to make generally good progress in Year 3. However, in the limited sample seen in the higher years teaching was only satisfactory. This agrees with the school's judgement. This is leading to inadequate progress in Year 5 because there is not enough good teaching to enable pupils to catch up fast enough. The school's monitoring suggests that this could also be the case in Year 6.

There are weaknesses leading to a slower rate of progress for both pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and higher achieving pupils in Key Stage 2. Expectations are often still not high enough to ensure challenge for more able pupils. The school has begun to identify gifted and talented pupils but the provision in the classroom is unsatisfactory. The deployment of the many teaching assistants has been improved to ensure a greater focus on individual need. But this has yet to impact on achievement for pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of teaching; for example, identified weaknesses are not always followed through. There is excellent teaching in the school but the inconsistencies in quality, especially at Key Stage 2, are hindering the progress of pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Improve the quality of teaching to provide activities that are suitably challenging for all groups of learners – satisfactory

## Leadership and management

The executive headteacher leads with conviction, honesty and has been unafraid to deal with some challenging staffing difficulties. This is crucial to the school's progress as it ensures that most staff accept the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. She has instilled a sense of shared ownership and responsibility amongst many staff which is driving the school forward. This change of culture is an impressive achievement in a relatively short period of time. She is ably supported by the deputy headteacher who ensures that the school runs very well on a day-to-day basis. He has been instrumental in securing some very good new appointments, for example, the new inclusion manager. There are also some emerging strengths in subject leadership particularly of Key Stage 1.

The IEB has made a good start since its inception about three months before this visit. The chair has a clear strategic view of the school which he has successfully communicated to staff. He has a good grip of the important issues and has a positive, but realistic, view of the necessary timescales to address them. He is rightly very supportive of the executive headteacher. The chair understands that there is more to do to ensure that a 'shadow' governing body is developed that can, at the appropriate time, take responsibility for the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- Ensure that governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and work closely with all other leaders to bring about improvement – good

#### External support

The school has benefited from the very good strategic support of the LA which took the robust, but necessary, step of replacing the governing body with an IEB. This has been achieved very quickly and with minimal disruption to the smooth running of the school. The LA's action plan is detailed and suitably ambitious. Hillcross also benefits from effective support by a range of external consultants. The school and the LA rightly judge that the focus of this support will now focus on ensuring better progress for pupils at Key Stage 2.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that both the induction and monitoring of new staff, especially newly qualified teachers, are highly effective.