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Mr Alan Harding
Birch Hill Primary School
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Dear Mr Harding

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 February 2010 and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner, staff and pupils.

Since the last inspection the school has employed three newly qualified teachers. An external consultant has been working at the school one day a week helping staff explore creative teaching strategies for mathematics.

As a result of the inspection on 3–4 June 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve the rate at which pupils make progress in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics, by using assessment data more effectively to set challenging targets
- ensure that more of the teaching and learning are of good quality by matching work more accurately to pupils' needs
- improve the rigour of monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress and their learning in lessons to speed up improvement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

Key Stage 2 test data for 2009 show that standards in English and mathematics were below the national average and at Key Stage 1 standards were broadly in line with the national average. Senior leaders have put in place new systems for monitoring pupils' progress to address inadequate progress of pupils at Key Stage 2. A more systematic focus on every pupil helps staff use assessment data to plan learning better matched to pupils' needs. Staff now have a more thorough picture of the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, leading to quicker identification of those at risk of underachieving. Consequently at Key Stage 2, a greater proportion of



pupils are making better progress than previously. Current school data and lesson observations confirm this. Standards in mathematics are steadily rising and in Year 6 a higher proportion of pupils are on track to attain standards above the national average by the end of the year. While retaining a relentless focus on raising achievement in mathematics across the school, there are inroads still to be made in helping boys achieve higher standards in writing and reading.

The school rightly chose to focus on improving the quality of teaching and as a result leaders conduct more rigorous monitoring of teaching. Staff are more frequently engaged in sharing best practice leading to a more consistent approach to planning lessons and creative approaches in teaching. Good teaching is now characterised by good pace, effective use of open-ended questioning, helping pupils evaluate their learning, and more imaginative use of resources linked to pupils' level of ability. Where teaching is less effective the needs of more able pupils are not always met. Leaders accept that using assessment data to plan challenging learning for more able pupils needs more action. Staff are receptive to new ideas for teaching mathematics. Building cross-curricular links through mathematics is securing better progress and as one pupil said, 'I really enjoy maths now; its fun.' Teaching assistants support the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, through well-planned individual intervention work.

The majority of pupils know their challenging targets and can identify what they need to do to improve. Pupils' work is marked regularly. Some marking purposefully guides pupils through small steps to improve their work, but this is not embedded across the school. A few pupils are still unclear about their targets and what levels they are currently achieving.

The local authority statement of action gave the school a clear strategy for improvement. The local authority monitors the school's work regularly and the school responds well to good quality support from the School Improvement Partner and external consultants. Monitoring visits provide accurate evaluations of the progress being made. Senior leaders and governors successfully devised a cohesive action plan setting focused targets and performance indicators to measure school improvement. The action plan has been carefully implemented and monitored by the local authority, governing body and senior leaders. The quality of teaching is constantly under review in securing better progress for pupils. Senior leaders have taken ownership of setting the vision for the school, leading key changes and ensuring that all staff are fully supported in working at a quicker pace to raise achievement for all pupils.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

