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Mr Jon Harris
Headteacher
Hamilton School
Hamilton Road
Handsworth
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Dear Mr Harris

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hamilton School

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make sure the action plan contains suitably challenging, measurable targets for teaching and pupils' achievement by the end of the summer term 2014
- when evaluating the overall quality of teaching, take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress over time as well as in individual lessons.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated. I toured the school with you and visited classrooms and the outdoor areas. I looked briefly at the

new system for tracking pupils' progress and examined the records of monitoring activities.

Context

Since the school's inspection, three new members of teaching staff have joined the school, replacing previous temporary appointments. A deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher have been appointed. The school's roll is expanding to help address the shortfall in places for children in the city who have autistic spectrum disorder. There are ten more pupils on roll and further expansion is planned. The Early Years Foundation Stage now comprises two classes. A new classroom has been built and more building works are to follow.

Main findings

The outcome of the inspection came as a surprise and a disappointment to you, the staff and the governing body. However, you have not dwelt on this and all parties share a determination to move forward and be judged a good school as soon as possible. Much has been done since the inspection. You have taken swift steps to strengthen the quality of teaching through new appointments and internal redeployments. Monitoring activities have been refocused so that they take account of the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. There is a comprehensive calendar of monitoring activities across the term. It shows clearly who will be involved and what they will do and includes a role for the governing body. It also shows that you are making good use of links with external partners to help with the evaluation of aspects of provision. This means that you are able to compare your own judgements with those of others.

The revised tracking system is a positive step and will help you and your staff to analyse outcomes for individuals and groups in some detail. It will form a good basis for discussions with members of staff.

The action plan shows clearly what you intend to do to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. It is a good working document and demonstrates a considered and staged approach to improvement. What it does not do so strongly, though, is set out clearly enough the vision that you, your staff and the governing body have for the school, or the timescale within which you believe you can be judged a good school. I understand from my discussions with you and others that the ultimate aim is to be an outstanding school. The action plan needs to contain measurable targets that plot the journey towards this goal.

The inspection report did not include recommendations about pupils' achievement. Nevertheless, the action plan could usefully be strengthened by making links between the steps taken to improve teaching and the intended impact on pupils' learning and progress. When evaluating the quality of teaching and how it is improving, you must take account of the impact on outcomes for the pupils across the year, as well as analysing what is observed in individual lessons.

You are investing effort and money into refurbishing some of the outdoor areas, because outdoor provision was judged to need improvement. You need to know, however, that the investment you are making will lead directly to better achievement for the pupils. You need to concentrate first and foremost on making improvements that will lead to better teaching and learning. You and the governing body need to be sure that refurbishing outdoor areas will have a positive impact on learning. If not, then it is my view that you should feel confident to reshape the action plan.

The governing body is building on the strengths noted at the inspection and there is evident support and challenge for the school's leaders. The governing body is fully involved in the drive for improvement.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. To this end, I would like you to send me a copy of an amended action plan, containing measurable targets for the end of the summer term that, if met, indicate that the school would be likely to be judged good at an inspection during the autumn term. I would then like an evaluation of progress towards these targets to be sent to me at the start of the autumn term 2014. I will discuss these with you and we will then decide on the next steps.

External support

You are making good use of support provided by other schools to help evaluate teaching and learning. The local authority has also provided support through visiting and contributing to monitoring through learning walks. You are also working closely with the local authority regarding further expansion of the school's roll and associated building work. The governing body will need to check carefully that these activities do not have an adverse impact on the rate of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector