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15 October 2014

Ms Jackie Avis  
Acting Headteacher  
Squirrels Heath Junior School  
Salisbury Road  
Romford  
RM2 5TP

Dear Ms Avis

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Squirrels Heath Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 ensure that:

- its development plan is amended to take on board the main findings in this letter
- the external review of governance is undertaken without delay and that the governing body acts promptly on its findings.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other leaders, four members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's development plan was evaluated. You joined me on some visits to lessons where we observed teaching and learning, and

looked at pupils' work. We scrutinised some work from pupils in Year 4 and Year 5. I held discussions with six teachers and eight pupils from Years 3 to 6.

## **Context**

The previous headteacher left the school in August and a new headteacher has been appointed to start in January 2015. The deputy headteacher is currently the acting headteacher. There has been a temporary redeployment of senior leaders' responsibilities. Four teachers left the school in August and four joined in September. One Year 4 class is being taught by supply teachers.

## **Main findings**

Leaders' and teachers' immediate response to the inspection's findings has been effective. Their plans pay sufficient attention to all of the areas for improvement and recent actions have ensured improvements to teaching have begun. However, some aspects of their plans do not look sufficiently far ahead. Proposed actions do not always make it clear what actions leaders will take to bring about improvements to teaching over time. Some monitoring and evaluation roles, including those of governors, are too vague and some timescales are not explicit enough. Leaders articulate clear intentions for improvements to teaching and pupils' achievement; however, some success criteria do not spell these out clearly enough.

The new approaches to lesson planning expect teachers to think about how activities will challenge all pupils. Middle leaders' checks are ensuring all teachers give this much greater attention. However, some teachers do not ensure that this results in all pupils being challenged consistently in lessons. Sometimes work is still too easy for some because discussions or activities are not adapted to suit pupils of different abilities.

Teachers understand leaders' new expectations of marking and it is now more frequent and consistent. Most marking includes some comments to help pupils improve their work. However, the quality of these comments varies. Some 'next steps' are not clear enough. Consequently, while all pupils are given time to improve their work after feedback from teachers, some comments do not allow them to make the most of this time. Teachers have much higher expectations of how well pupils present their work. Focussed handwriting time and clearly understood non-negotiable standards ensure that pupils present their work with greater pride.

Informal lesson observations are encouraging teachers to observe and share good practice. This has galvanised staff in supporting each other and has led to some improvements to teaching. Leaders have established systems which give them a more accurate picture of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Leaders have plans to use this to formally match good practice to areas where teaching requires improvement, but these are at a very early stage.

Most teachers are managing pupils' behaviour well because of the newly agreed expectations. New recording systems support this by ensuring that, in the majority of cases, teachers are responding proportionately and consistently to behavioural issues. Pupils observe that very occasionally, some teachers do not manage behaviour with consistent fairness.

Senior and middle leaders' roles are defined more clearly. Checks on teachers' planning, scrutiny of work and meetings to discuss pupils' progress have begun to give leaders a clearer picture of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Leaders' feedback and guidance for teachers is beginning to result in some improvements to teaching. However, there is a need for greater consistency and uniformity in how leaders plan to hold teachers to account.

Governors have ensured that decisive steps have been taken to secure new headship in the school. However, there has been a delay in arranging the external review of governance. This needs to take place urgently so that the governing body can act on its findings. While governors have taken action and link governors have been established for key areas of improvement, some governors are not clear enough about how they should evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has added rigour to the work of leaders by setting up half-termly monitoring boards to challenge and evaluate the school's work. English and mathematics consultants have helped teachers develop these aspects of the curriculum. As a result, teachers are starting to focus more on pupils' reading skills and beginning to plan mathematics lessons which offer greater challenge to pupils.

The local authority has arranged support from St Ursula's Junior School. Teachers from the partner school have begun to offer bespoke coaching to improve teaching at Squirrels Heath. These arrangements are at a very early stage and it is too early to see what impact they have had.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Pennington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**