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Mr Michael Lewis  
Covering headteacher  
Simon Marks Jewish Primary School  
75 Cazenove Road  
London  
N16 6PD

Dear Mr Lewis

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Simon Marks Jewish Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2016, 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that changes to policy and practice are firmly embedded and so promote consistently high quality teaching.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, as covering headteacher, and several teachers including the leaders of mathematics, English and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Meetings were also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The views of two members of staff who anonymously volunteered and completed

questionnaires were considered. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of documentation relating to the school's performance was scrutinised. You accompanied me during short visits to each classroom.

## **Context**

The substantive headteacher has been absent from school since early January due to ill health and you are currently covering her role. Only one class teacher who was in post at the time of the previous inspection remains at the school. Five teachers left the school at the end of the last academic year and three others left during the first term of this school year. Difficulties in recruiting teachers have led to temporary arrangements being made to cover a teaching vacancy in one year group.

## **Main findings**

Progress has been hindered significantly by the high number of teachers leaving and joining the school. This has compounded leaders' task of addressing the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. As a result, progress has been slow. Leaders have not been effective in ensuring that the changes implemented have been firmly embedded. Actions to address the key issues relating to raising the quality of teaching have not resulted in consistent improvements in teachers' practice, nor to pupils' achievement.

The local authority has supported the school to create an improvement plan addressing the issues identified in the previous inspection. It describes appropriate actions and criteria by which to judge its success. Local authority officers keep a close eye on the school's progress, evaluating progress against each of the improvement objectives on a termly basis.

The governing body has increased the frequency of its meetings by convening additional meetings of the chairs of each committee. These have enabled governors to maintain a detailed overview of the staffing changes as well as being an increasingly effective vehicle for holding leaders to account. Governors have a detailed understanding of the school's performance and of the barriers which have limited progress to date. The governing body has not lost sight of its overarching priority that pupils achieve well. This is despite recent calls on governors' attention to address recruitment issues and the absence of the headteacher. Scrutiny of governing body minutes indicates that governors, rightly, scrutinise the impact of leaders' work on pupils' outcomes closely. Governors engage productively with the local authority adviser assigned to oversee support for leadership and management, and the quality of teaching.

You have a realistic and accurate understanding of the issues needing to be addressed. You are determined that pupils achieve well and appreciate that there is no time to lose in bringing about rapid improvement. You are working closely and productively with the governing body and with local authority staff to ensure that

the pace of change increases. You are aware of the need for staff to be both supported and challenged. Teachers value your presence, approachability and frequent visits to classrooms.

As a result of the rapid changes in staffing, the development of subject leaders' skills is at an early stage. Leaders of English and mathematics are released from classes to carry out their leadership roles. However, there has been insufficient flexibility in their availability for them to be able to observe their colleagues' teaching. This means, for example, that the mathematics leader, who has a good understanding of the principles which underpin effective learning, including an appreciation of the value of practical resources, is unable to provide direct support for staff. You are aware of this and have plans in place to address the issue.

The quality of teaching is variable across the school. Practice is more consistent in Key Stage 1. Here, expectations of what pupils can achieve have been maintained over time. Pupils are given timely reminders of what is expected of them. Learning support assistants are deployed well, use their initiative and are observant. For example, they notice when pupils omit capital letters and act immediately to allow the error to be corrected. Classroom environments are generally well organised and tidy. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the quality of adults' interaction with children varies. At its best, adults enable children's learning by asking questions to prompt deeper thought and consideration: for example, asking children to predict what may happen next. However, sometimes adults are too proactive in leading activities and making decisions for children; this restricts the development of their independence and ability to weigh up situations and make decisions. In Key Stages 1 and 2, clear expectations for the presentation of work are outlined and displayed on the front cover of pupils' workbooks. However, in several of the books sampled, where pupils have previously demonstrated neat, cursive handwriting, its quality subsequently declines and reverts to printed script or becomes messy. This has not always been challenged by teachers. In most classes, adults present good models of handwriting, although feedback comments in some pupils' books are barely legible and do not set a good example for pupils to follow. In mathematics, teachers' emphasis has sometimes been on progressing through a planned series of lessons rather than ensuring that pupils have a thorough understanding of each concept before moving on. This leaves pupils confused and unable to apply the concepts in subsequent work. This is now a high priority for the school.

An appropriately qualified senior midday meals supervisor has been appointed to lead the midday supervisory team. The role involves facilitating play at lunchtime as well as providing training for staff. This is an effective use of the physical education and sport premium.

### **External support**

The local authority, through the Hackney Learning Trust (HLT), works closely with the school to provide support and challenge. Termly trust action group meetings

examine pupils' academic performance, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of leadership and management. A thorough review of the school's work in December 2015, carried out by the HLT, concluded that change had not been managed well enough. It prompted an increase in the level of support provided. The HLT's support is focused on two aspects of the school's work: leadership and management, and teaching and learning. Leadership support has been increased to three visits each week to support your work. This has enabled you to gain a more detailed understanding of what needs to be done. Associate deputies specialising in mathematics, teaching and learning, and early years, each visit twice-weekly. They work closely with newly appointed subject leaders to develop their skills and ensure that their actions result in a demonstrable impact on pupils' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for the London Borough of Hackney. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Loukes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**