

Serco Inspections  
Colmore Plaza  
20 Colmore Circus  
Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T: 0121 679 9164  
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com



9 October 2014

Mrs Marissa Davis  
Principal  
Harpenden Free School  
Crouch Hall Lane  
Redbourn  
AL3 7ET

Dear Mrs Davis

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harpenden Free School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 March 2014. 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:

- involve subject leaders fully in checking standards and pursuing improvements in their areas of responsibility
- ensure that all teachers understand their roles in achieving the improvement plan's objectives, and work towards targets that are precise and challenging
- monitor patterns in pupil absence carefully, and take effective action to increase attendance.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other leaders, the school's improvement partner and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made brief visits to a number of lessons and looked at the way teachers give pupils feedback about their work. I evaluated the school's improvement plans and documents relating to the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, you have been appointed as Principal and changes have been made to leaders' roles and responsibilities. A new Early Years Foundation Stage leader and a new special educational needs co-ordinator have been appointed, and there have been changes to the teaching staff.

## **Main findings**

The changes you have made to the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have increased their ability to provide effective support and challenge to teachers. Governors have made additional appointments that have strengthened the leadership team. They have secured improved premises so that pupils are taught in separate classrooms and do not all have to learn within the same space. Leaders are helping teachers to plan activities and evaluate which make the most difference to pupils' rates of progress. They are making sure that teachers share the most effective techniques with others.

The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has worked quickly to ensure teachers make accurate assessments of children's abilities on joining the school. Teachers are recording and reviewing children's progress frequently, and use this information to plan activities that help them take the next steps in their learning. Small-group tuition is starting to help the more-able to move forward rapidly, and those who are struggling to catch-up. Leaders are helping parents to understand how to best support their children's learning, but the absence rates of some children remain high.

New systems for monitoring pupils' achievement and progress identify those who need extra support, or additional challenge. Leaders check the impact of this during regular 'pupil progress' meetings. Changes to the timetable enable Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils to practise their literacy skills on a daily basis, and complete imaginative pieces of extended writing regularly. The school's monitoring information indicates that this is starting to raise pupils' confidence, and attainment in English. Leaders have detailed plans in place to improve teaching in mathematics and ensure pupils use their mathematical skills to solve problems. Teachers are following the new marking policy; this is encouraging pupils to respond to and learn from the feedback they receive.

The special educational needs co-ordinator is ensuring teachers work effectively with teaching assistants so that pupils with special educational needs can make better progress. Subject leaders' work to monitor, and improve, standards in their areas varies in its effectiveness. Sometimes teachers are set targets that lack precision and rigour, and that do not relate clearly to aspects of the school's improvement plan.

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**

Leaders and teachers have received effective support from the school's improvement partner, who has helped confirm the accuracy of their judgements about the quality of aspects of the school's work. External checks have been used to validate the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Local authority advisers have helped the school to develop the strategies it uses to improve attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**