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Mrs Thomson
Headteacher
Hillcrest Primary School
Cowper Street
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS7 4DR

Dear Mrs Thomson

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of Hillcrest Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Tuesday 13 December 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. I would be grateful if you could pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the school improvement advisor and the pupils I spoke to. They were very helpful.

Since the previous inspection a number of new appointments have been made throughout the school. The school has, and continues to experience, a high volume of staff absence.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 June 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is satisfactory.

Pupils' attainment is now lower than it was in 2010 and the secure and rapid learning and progress evident at the time of the previous inspection have not been maintained. This is illustrated by the school failing to meet the government's minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progression in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2011. In addition, pupils' achievement by the end of this Key Stage was significantly lower than that of their counterparts in other schools nationally. Mathematics attainment improved but the deficit between pupils' attainments in reading and writing and national averages by the end of Key Stage 1 grew wider in 2011. No Year 2 pupil gained a higher level in the national tests, whilst fewer Year 6 pupils than in 2010 gained higher levels. Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2011 were lower than those attained in 2010. However, refinements to assessment practice have resulted in more rigorous and accurate tracking which indicates children's progress is strong currently. The school's data indicate that pupils' progress varies considerably across year groups and within subjects. There is some

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accelerated progress but this is counter-balanced by slow progress and regression. School data, and lesson observations indicate that Year 6 are unlikely to achieve their targets as they have a tremendous amount of lost ground to recover due to their previous underachievement and their current slow progress. Booster classes, one-to-one tuition, training to increase the personal effectiveness of staff, more sharply-focused in-class support, and a skills-based approach to learning are being utilised to accelerate pupils' learning and progress. School leaders have also introduced a more systematic approach to teaching letters and sounds and problem-solving which they are rolling out throughout the school to improve pupils' basic skills. The impact of these actions is insufficiently evident.

Pupils' attendance in 2011 at 91.3% was lower than it was in 2010 despite school leaders' efforts to raise it. Several strategies exist to raise awareness among pupils and their parents and carers of the negative impact regular absence can have on children's education. There is also a high profile rewards system for good attendance and a more robust approach to challenging groups of pupils who are persistently absent. These actions have led to some recent improvement and at the time of this inspection attendance was 93.5%.

The school's behaviour management strategy is showing signs of impact. The task remains challenging, which is reflected in over thirty eight exclusions last year but school leaders are making inroads in improving the atmosphere and ethos in and out of the classroom. The volume of incidents and dangerous occurrences has reduced significantly. Pupils endorse this, and say they feel safer. The exuberant behaviour mentor is well respected and acts as a calming influence. He is aided by the behaviour support worker and several other staff who help to monitor, moderate and improve pupils' behaviour. The deputy headteacher overseeing this aspect has a good understanding of potential flash points for misbehaviour generally, and for identified pupils. To counteract these triggers pupils now have access to a range of supervised activities at social times. Some pupils are taught in 'nurture' groups, whilst others receive counselling in anger management and improving their social skills. There are also clearer rewards and sanctions procedures. Joint-working with a learning support unit and an educational psychologist is helping the school to break the cycle of poor behaviour some pupils have fallen into. However, some staff have different thresholds of what is and what is not acceptable behaviour and this leads to inconsistency and mixed messages for pupils.

A series of joint lesson observations by the lead inspector and headteacher concluded that some good teaching exists but that the majority was either satisfactory or inadequate. Overall, there is an insufficient critical mass of effective teaching to enable pupils to reduce meaningfully the large gaps that exist between their attainments and national age-related expectations. In some lessons there is a vibrant, demanding and supportive learning environment which is enabling pupils to make faster progress. This is counter-balanced by other lessons where expectations of what pupils are capable of are low. In these lessons, work is not precisely matched to pupils' abilities, nor do staff teach them the skills to reach their targets and objectives successfully. It is the pupils who dictate the pace of learning and there is little urgency on the part of staff to really challenge and engage pupils. Some pupils are unable to work purposefully unless staff supervise them directly. Assessment practice is

improving, but school leaders do not yet have a clear and reliable baseline of all pupils' performance which they can use to systematically track all pupils' progress, and give bespoke support to boost their performance. Pupils are aware of their targets, but are less sure of what specifically they should do to meet them. Marking and feedback is variable, although good practice does exist.

Teaching subjects, and key skills, methods and concepts through a series of themes is proving popular with pupils and helping to enliven learning. It is also helping them to more readily understand the connections between subjects. This is supplemented by an increasing range of visits and visitors to widen pupils' horizons and offer them new experiences.

Leaders and managers' commitment and ambition is evident and they understand the deep-rooted challenges afflicting the school. They are implementing a strategy which they believe will systematically address the challenges. They state that 'there is no quick fix' for these problems and are working doggedly to monitor teaching and learning and mentor and train staff. Leaders have also refined curriculum planning and delivery, and have adopted a more inclusive and supportive approach to behaviour management. Although leaders have begun to hold staff more rigorously to account for their performance and the outcomes of pupils in their classes, there remains a degree of resistance to the school's vision for the future. This manifests itself in some non-compliance with agreed protocols and practices by staff, which is impeding and undermining efforts to achieve greater consistency and quality throughout the school. More than 17 months have elapsed since the previous section 5 inspection and standards have not risen, nor have pupils' learning and progress blossomed. There is also inconsistency in the quality of teaching, marking and feedback. As a result, there is insufficient evidence, despite the concerted efforts of leaders and managers, that the school is improving or that it has demonstrated a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The local authority has provided a range of support, advice and guidance to try to enhance the quality of provision and raise academic standards. To date, this input has not prompted the necessary resurgence in the school's performance. The governing body is very clear about the school's failings and areas of strength. The governing body accepts that the school is not improving fast enough but believes there are sufficient green shoots emerging to suggest the school is improving. There is evidence that the governing body is challenging and evaluating the impact of actions taken by senior leaders. However, the governing body's influence in affecting change is not wholly evident.

This monitoring inspection included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures which met current requirements.

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

Yours sincerely,

John Young

September 2011



Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010

- Raise attainment and accelerate the progress of all pupils in English, mathematics and science by:
 - using more systematically the information gained from tracking pupils' progress to ensure that work in lessons meets each pupils' needs
 - ensuring that more pupils reach higher levels in their work
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to develop their skills in all areas of the curriculum.

- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching so that a greater proportion is good and better by:
 - sharing good and outstanding practice among staff
 - raising expectations in terms of handwriting and presentation
 - ensuring that teachers' marking gives pupils clear guidance on the next steps in their learning so they know how to improve their work
 - ensuring consistency in the management of pupils' behaviour.

- Develop the impact of leadership and management by:
 - embedding consistent practice in all areas of the school's work
 - ensuring that governors are fully and systematically involved in evaluating the school's performance and practice.

- Raise levels of attendance of all pupils by increasing the range and appeal of incentives.