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19 January 2011

Mr J Moore
Aston Tower Community Primary School
Upper Sutton Street
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Dear Mr Moore

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Aston Tower Community Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the governors, staff and pupils who gave up their time to meet with me during the inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the school has strengthened the staff team with the appointment of four new teachers in Key Stage 2. There have also been changes to the structure and composition of the leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 20 October 2009, 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' attainment has improved markedly since the previous inspection. After a long history of assessment and test results being significantly below the national average at end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, the results in 2010 were very close to the national average at the end of Key Stage 1 and were only just below average at the end of Key Stage 2. Given the low starting point on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. The school monitors pupils' progress rigorously and latest data show that pupils are continuing to achieve well and that standards are continuing to rise.



These improvements have arisen because of the school's continuing drive to raise teachers' expectations and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The most noticeable improvements have been in Years 5 and 6, where new staff appointments have strengthened the teaching team and introduced a much greater level of challenge to the day-to-day teaching. Good behaviour throughout the school and the pupils' positive attitudes, forged by the high-quality care and support of the staff, contribute strongly to pupils' good achievement. In the great majority of classes, the quality of the teaching is consistently good. Lessons are well structured. Teachers use a wide range of resources, including information and communication technology, well. Teaching assistants are effective in providing support for targeted pupils. Pupils have a good understanding of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to improve. There remain, however, a few classes where the teaching is still only satisfactory. In these classes, the pace of learning is slower, teachers are less challenging in the questions they ask and the tasks they provide, and the planning does not cater sufficiently for differing ability levels.

The school has had a concerted and successful drive to improve the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils now write extensively, not only in their English lessons, but also in a wide range of subjects. There is a pleasing absence of worksheets, although the occasional use of writing templates, while helping less able pupils, imposes unnecessary restrictions on the writing of the more able. The teachers generally implement the school's marking policy well, giving pupils a very clear indication through comments and the use of different colours of what they have done well and where they need to improve. Pupils are also becoming much more involved in assessing their own work and that of their peers. They enjoy doing this and say that it helps them to learn. Both the teachers' marking and pupils' self-assessment have undoubtedly had a significant impact on improving pupils' achievement. However, there is still variation in the amount of work which is marked in sufficient detail, and not enough time is allowed for pupils to go back over the work they have done to learn from their mistakes or to respond to their teachers' comments.

The school has rightly given highest priority to improving pupils' writing and the quality of teaching, and has taken longer to deal with the curricular issues highlighted in the previous inspection report. Planning for the implementation of a more culturally relevant and creative curriculum has been thorough and has captured the imagination and enthusiasm of the staff. Staff have now started to implement their new curricular plans, but these have not been in operation long enough to judge the longer-term impact on pupils' achievement. However, work on display and in pupils' books indicates that the new cross-curricular approach is already providing good opportunities for pupils to consolidate their writing skills and to broaden their education. Pupils say that they like the new approach and find the work much more interesting than before.

The school has not had a great deal of additional support from the local authority or other partners over the last year, the former considering the school to have sufficient capacity to improve under its own steam. This has, indeed, been the case. The school has a large leadership team, which now includes phase leaders, each responsible for two year groups, and two higher-level teaching assistants who oversee the work of other teaching assistants. The new structure is effective. Senior and middle leaders have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have been effective in helping their teams to focus on improvement and to develop accountability. The significant improvement in pupils' attainment and achievement throughout the school demonstrates that the school has developed well its capacity for sustained improvement.

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

Graham Sims
Additional inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009

- Improve standards throughout the school to raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress.
- Improve standards in writing by:
 - rigorously assessing pupils' strengths and weaknesses in writing to identify what particular things will help to accelerate pupils' progress in this aspect of pupils' work
 - extending the opportunities for writing across subjects in the curriculum.
- Implement fully the school's planning for a culturally relevant curriculum in order to promote high-quality learning for all pupils by:
 - building an expectation of creativity into the school's teaching and learning policy and lesson planning procedures
 - helping pupils to make the connections between different areas of learning
 - ensuring that what is taught celebrates the cultural diversity of the pupils.
- Raise the quality of teaching across the school by:
 - ensuring that all teachers fully involve pupils in their learning
 - ensuring that all lessons have good pace and balance
 - using information from assessment more effectively when planning lessons in order to meet pupils' needs more accurately.