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Mrs I Cleaver
Headteacher
Athelney Primary School
Athelney Street
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SE6 3LD

Dear Mrs Cleaver

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Athelney Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you could thank members of staff, the chair of the governing body and the group of pupils who met with me.

In September 2010, the school opened a designated resource base for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. During its first two years it will have capacity for eight pupils and this will extend to 16 pupils thereafter. The few children currently attending the base are in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1. There have been a number of internal management changes. An assistant headteacher has been appointed as manager of the resource base. One of the middle leaders has been promoted to a newly created inclusion leader post, and two substantive key phase leaders have been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 28 and 29 January 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.

The improving trend in attainment in Key Stage 1 is being sustained and, in 2010, unvalidated national assessments in Year 2 show a marked improvement, for example in the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher levels in reading and writing. End-of-Key Stage 2 national tests in 2009 reflected significant improvements



in English, mathematics and science, including at the higher levels in all three subjects. For instance, over half of the pupils achieved Level 5 in English, which is almost double that of the previous year. While this exceptional Key Stage 2 rise was not sustained in 2010, the trend over time is one of steady improvement. Pupils' overall attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2010 was broadly average, although it was below this for pupils' attainment at Level 5. Writing remains the greatest challenge for some pupils.

Evidence from brief visits to some lessons and from school tracking data indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to their low starting points, although there is some variability between classes, which staff are tackling. In 2009, the school was among the top 100 performing schools nationally in relation to pupil progress measures. In 2010, pupils made good progress and this was particularly evident in mathematics. There are no significant variations in the progress of different groups. This positive picture is due to the improved quality of teaching and use of assessment, the impact of curriculum planning and the effective systems which the school has for tracking and intervention. A consistent feature of lessons is that teachers plan a suitable range of varied and interesting activities which engage pupils and meet the full range of abilities. Pupils enjoy their work and are keen to do well. Teachers' probing questions help them gauge pupils' understanding and what adjustments need to be made to keep pupils engaged and on track. Teaching assistants enhance the quality of learning through their encouraging support for those who need it. There are some examples of effective marking which help pupils know how improve and pupils' own written comments show how they have taken this on board. Pupils' excellent behaviour in lessons and assembly reflects the high expectations which are set, how well staff engage them in activities and the consistent way they manage the behaviour, even of the most challenging pupils.

Pupils' attendance is improving and, in 2010, it was above the local and national average. The proportion of pupils who were persistently absent fell and is now below average. While current attendance since the start of term is broadly average, it is better than that in all but two of the classes. These improvements are a direct result of the school's focused efforts in highlighting the importance of attendance. Attendance is now a specific focus during review meetings with parents and carers. The school makes regular contact with parents, especially those whose children are more frequently absent. A combination of support for parents and carers, and more formal action, when necessary, is paying dividends. The school is rightly focusing on ways of improving the attendance of the younger pupils so that good habits are started early. Attendance trends are monitored very well, as are patterns of academic progress, although the links between the two are not routinely made. Pupils respond very well to the range of incentives, such as 'golden tickets', which encourage them to come to school regularly and on time. The school is constantly looking at ways it can help pupils who struggle, even if this means providing the occasional alarm clock with help from a children's charity! There are some missed opportunities to give older pupils more responsibility for monitoring their own attendance against personal and class targets.

The phase team structure which is now well developed ensures that all staff share collective ownership for continuous improvement. The comment made that staff and the governing body are, 'On the same train moving in the same direction', aptly describes how well they pull together. The leadership team works well in driving improvement and the headteacher provides a very strong lead and inspiration. There is no room at Athelney for excuses, and staff work hard to understand and tackle any reasons for any underperformance. Monitoring and performance management systems ensure that staff are held to account for the progress that pupils make. The school holds rich performance data that enables it to know where its strengths lie and what it needs to do to improve further. It is now looking beyond its horizons to measure performance against similar schools locally so that it can sharpen and refine its own practice. The school appreciates the valuable support the local authority provides, for instance, through the work of consultants in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the support and challenge of the school improvement officer and the active involvement of the attendance and welfare officer. The local authority is effectively monitoring the school's path of improvement through its termly school achievement reviews.

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 Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise standards in English overall and at the higher levels in mathematics and science, by matching teaching to the range of pupils' learning needs, and ensuring that pupils make good progress throughout their time in school.
- Ensure that senior and middle leaders focus on the progress of all pupils, particularly the more able, in monitoring and evaluating lessons, pupils' work and curriculum planning.
- Improve attendance by increasing the range of strategies to engage parents in the work of the school.