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1 March 2011

Mr B Banks
Headteacher
Ashurst Primary School
New Glade Hill
Off Chain Lane
Blackbrook
St Helens
Merseyside WA11 9QJ

Dear Mr Banks,

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

I noted that, since the last inspection, the school has faced staffing issues, including absences, which have disrupted the continuity of education for some pupils. Two new teachers have been appointed, one in September, the other in January.

As a result of the inspection on 20-21 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 inadequate progress in making improvements but satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment fell in 2010 to its lowest point in five years and was well below the school's original target for the Year 6 pupils. In mathematics, the proportion of these pupils who reached an above average level for their age increased but this was at the expense of attainment in English. Taken overall, the pupils' results in the end of Key Stage 2 tests were significantly below the national average, because of a substantial drop in attainment in English. In mathematics, attainment was below average overall, though not significantly so. This year group had not made sufficient progress through the key stage in either English or mathematics. In Key Stage 1, attainment in writing fell to a low level. Improving attainment in English, particularly writing, while maintaining standards in other subjects, is now a key priority for the school. The school's records show that pupils' rate of progress has begun to improve recently. Teachers' assessments show that, in most classes, pupils made good progress from September to December, with some particularly good gains on the part of pupils who get extra help. However, throughout the school, too many pupils are not working

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at the level expected for their age. Accelerated progress needs to be maintained over the long term, if pupils are to catch up lost ground. The inadequate achievement evident from last year's test results means that progress since October 2009 in making improvements is inadequate, despite the more positive recent picture.

Teachers have received a good amount of additional training and have been helped by local authority staff. The quality of teaching has improved, though not as much as the school had hoped. Greater consistency is evident, for example, in classroom displays and in the planning of lessons. New teachers have strengthened the team and during this inspection teaching was more often good than satisfactory. Teachers consistently maintained an orderly working atmosphere and had good relationships with pupils. Pupils were well behaved, had positive attitudes to learning and applied themselves well to their work. The headteacher is aware, however, that the quality of teaching occasionally slips to inadequate. In the most effective lessons, teachers had high expectations of what pupils could achieve. They planned lessons thoughtfully to meet the range of abilities and particular needs in their classes, ensuring that all pupils were actively involved and thinking and that all were sufficiently challenged. Well-focused and probing questions pressed pupils to develop their ideas and deepen their thinking. When teaching was satisfactory, rather than good, planning and delivery were less precise, with less adjustment made to meet pupils' needs, staff focused overly on the completion of tasks rather than increasing pupils' understanding. The quality of marking of pupils' work varied. Some was detailed and helpful but at times marking was not sufficiently clear about how pupils could improve their work.

Staff and the governing body working together have made satisfactory progress in improving the opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of diversity in Britain. The 'World Week' enabled pupils to work with people from minority ethnic groups and a link with a contrasting school is underway.

Extensive support from the local authority and a National Leader in Education has strengthened the school's capacity for improvement. Teachers' skills have been developed and systems to underpin the school's self-evaluation have been improved. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance are more robust. For instance, regular assessments of pupils' attainment are moderated among the staff. They are used to keep track of pupils' progress, to identify underachievement and to hold teachers responsible for pupils' progress. This more rigorous approach and the early signs of pupils' better academic progress mean the school is now better placed to improve the quality of its provision and the outcomes for pupils. The challenge for the school now is to maintain recent improvements and move forward with much less external support.

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

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex

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

- Ensure that the more able pupils achieve their full potential in mathematics by:
 - making sure that teachers' planning provides learning experiences to match the needs of this group.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - using searching and challenging questions which encourage pupils to extend their understanding
 - ensuring that the pace of learning is brisk so that pupils remain engaged and enjoy their lessons
 - ensuring that the best practice is shared.
- Ensure that pupils have a better understanding of Britain's multicultural society by:
 - allowing opportunities for active engagement with other ethnic, cultural and religious groups.