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11 March 2011

Mrs J McCarron-Charles  
Headteacher  
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Harold Road  
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Dear Mrs McCarron-Charles

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Dudley Infant School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. It was particularly helpful that some of your governors were able to come to school and contribute to discussions. Since the last inspection, the school has experienced significant and on-going staffing issues. A small number of these are still unresolved.

As a result of the inspection on 20 January 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

At the last inspection, attainment was low, although pupils made good progress from lower than expected starting points. Their achievement was satisfactory. Pupils' attainment has improved since that time, with the results of the teacher assessments in 2010 showing that standards were broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. Rather too many pupils attained at the lower end of the expected level in reading, although the proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels were above those expected for their age, in all three subjects, and were in line with national averages. Inspection sampling of lessons and the school's rigorous analysis of data confirm this. Improvements in reading for the average and below average pupils has further improved with the better use of time spent on guided reading. This was accomplished through in-service training for teachers and support for parents and carers. There is good evidence of work on display illustrating that

pupils have had better opportunities for extended writing activities in Years 1 and 2 and some evidence that they have tried editing and improving their work on display.

The leader of mathematics, new to the post at the last inspection, has, with support from the local authority, helped colleagues gain a better understanding of the national strategy for mathematics, trialled new medium-term plans and introduced new resources for the subject. This has helped the school make small but nonetheless positive gains in attainment.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by the headteacher and other leaders has been improved. The performance of teachers is tracked over time and this is supporting improvement. Systems are in place for evaluating teaching and learning, although different formats for noting the outcomes of observations lead to some discrepancies in the quality of the arrangements. Leaders know that there is still a little way to go before teaching is consistently good. During the inspections, the vast majority of lessons seen were good, with none that was less than satisfactory.

In lessons, teachers shared learning objectives with pupils and in most lessons also shared how pupils might judge if they had been successful. The school calls this 'steps to success'. Increasingly effective use of the interactive whiteboards helps focus pupils' attention and motivates them. Teaching assistants often make a valuable contribution to learning, but are sometimes not active in the early parts of lessons. However, in a Year 2 lesson, a teaching assistant, early in the lesson, was noting down the mathematical vocabulary used by a range of pupils.

Marking of work is inconsistent; at best, it supports learning and helps pupils to see what their next steps in learning should be. Although teachers provide tasks that are satisfactorily matched to pupils' needs and abilities, this is not always the case. Sometimes, higher-attaining pupils are set similar tasks to others. Use of 'talk partners' helps pupils to share their ideas with a friend before answering difficult questions. Where this was used, it speeded up responses and gave all children opportunities to take part. This was not used consistently and in one lesson the lack of its use meant that many pupils waited some time before their answers were taken. Equally, not all teachers made efforts to assess the progress that different groups of pupils were making during lessons.

After a slow start in developing the outside learning area for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, due to gaining the necessary finance and planning consents, the programme is now moving quickly to a conclusion. The leader confirms that they already have sufficient resources for the venture but need to explore how best the area can be used. The school has moved, with advice, to extend the time given to children for exploring their own ideas. Well over half of teaching time is set aside for this purpose. However, the time spent on these activities is not always as profitable as it might be. As this is quite a change for practitioners, more time is to be spent on seeking advice on how to manage and set

out activities for this purpose. During the inspection, the leader had set up activities on the playground, from which children made choices. She was able to support them in their choices and in the activities, helping ensure that their interests were served well and that the development of basic skills was supported and extended. The situation was not as clear to see in the classroom. Some areas of choice lacked interest and excitement for children and as a result few chose them. Unfortunately, this included activities for writing, which children chose to avoid. Where children were working with adults on other activities, interest and enjoyment were higher.

The school has had valuable support from the local authority in helping it gain a clearer vision for improvement. The school makes good use of systems to check progress made by pupils. This is part of its drive to help reduce underachievement. However, different systems are used in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 classes, causing some inaccuracies as children move through the school.

Leaders in English and mathematics have been more clearly focused on checking pupils' progress and ensuring that attainment improves. They have spent time looking at their subjects in action and drawing up plans for further improvement based on a clear understanding of data. They realise that there is now a need to have a stronger focus on evaluating their initiatives in order to ensure further progress. Although classes in a year group plan together, there is insufficient attention paid to planning across the whole school in order to ensure coverage of the curriculum. The high rate of staff absences has meant that initiatives put forward by leaders have not always been embedded in day-to-day practice. A good focus has been placed on professional development for teachers and assistants in order that they might extend their own skills and knowledge. In spite of this, leadership and management have only had a satisfactory impact on improvement. Indeed, the school is only too aware that the pressure for further improvement remains.

The Governing body is supportive and understands well the improvements that the school has embarked upon. It has supported the headteacher in making changes, some of which have been difficult to implement. The strategic curriculum team, formed at the end of 2010, together with the senior leadership team, is well aware of what still needs to be done. These groups, together with experienced subject leaders and the continuing support of the local authority, ensure the school's satisfactory capacity to sustain 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

Gavin Jones  
**Additional Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010.**

- By July 2010, improve attainment to average or better and lift the quality of teaching and learning to become consistently good by:
  - enabling pupils to undertake extended pieces of writing allowing time to edit work and improve their skills
  - making sure that pupils learn new mathematical skills systematically and are given work that matches their differing capabilities
  - introducing more guided reading activities in Year 1.
  
- Build on the good start already made to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - improving the outside learning area
  - extending children's learning, especially when they select activities for themselves, and by doing more writing activities.
  
- Strengthen management systems still further by:
  - sharing management roles more widely
  - producing precise summary information about the progress and attainment of pupils so that leaders have explicit information about all groups of learners.