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Mr Gary Thornton
The Headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Milton Street
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West Midlands
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Dear Mr Thornton

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Palfrey Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 March 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 governor, staff and pupils who gave up their time to meet with me during the inspection.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a change of headteacher and several new teachers have been appointed. There have also been changes to the structure and composition of the leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 July 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 shown good improvement since the last inspection. After several years when test results showed pupils to be leaving school with attainment below average in English and mathematics, the results in 2010 in both subjects were above the national and local average. Mathematics was an identified area for



improvement at the last inspection. Given the starting points of many pupils on entry to the school this represents good achievement, especially as a significant number of pupils enter the school with a low understanding of English. The school monitors pupils' progress accurately and the latest data show that pupils are sustaining better achievement throughout the school and that standards continue to rise.

The improvements have arisen because the school has focused strongly upon the underlying causes of past underachievement. In mathematics particularly, the school realised that pupils had insufficient understanding of the language of mathematics, especially when involved in problem solving. Teachers in all classes now concentrate effectively on the use of 'language ladders' which help pupils in their understanding of the meaning of texts. As a result, for example, pupils can explain the meaning of 'integer' and 'factors' and define parallelogram. The widespread use of interactive games, smartboards and technology are also proving to be effective tools for learning. However, the school is still striving to enable more pupils to reach the higher Level 5 in mathematics by the end of Year 6. Many older pupils come in daily before school to take part in extra mathematics. This is because they have very positive attitudes to learning, and a strong competitive instinct, so that they always want to do better than before. Pupils have good knowledge of their learning targets because teachers have improved all aspects of their guidance to them, particularly in marking and verbal support. Pupils are now also involved far more in the self-assessment of their own work.

The school's use of data measuring pupils' progress shows marked improvement. Regular testing ensures that leaders have a constantly updated picture of the learning of all pupils. They are swift to react if any pupil shows signs of faltering progress. Importantly, all teachers are also confident in their analysis and use of progress data, so are able to check daily on progress if necessary. This has helped teaching and learning to become more consistent across the school as planning is based effectively on the differing needs of each pupil.

The proportion of good teaching in the school is now high. Teaching observed during this visit was consistently good and characterised by good relationships, high expectations, enjoyable learning and good questioning skills, which resulted in good engagement by pupils and exceptionally good behaviour. Leaders join the headteacher in frequent monitoring visits to classrooms to formally observe teaching and learning. This has led to improved guidance and better teaching outcomes, because teachers have a clear understanding of the strengths of their practice and how it could be improved. At present though, there is no timetable on how and when any guidance to teachers will be followed up in order to verify its effectiveness.

The school has not requested a great deal of support from Walsall's Education provider in the last year, considering rightly that it has sufficient capacity to improve under its own leadership. The school has a wide range of effective partnerships to support the needs of pupils. These include Palfrey Community Association, Consultation and Inclusion Support Services, extended schools, local colleges and



Wolverhampton University. The headteacher has kept the school well focused on the key priorities of improving attainment in mathematics, making better use of pupils' progress data, and increasing the proportion of good teaching since the last inspection. At the same time he has established a strong and well-devolved management structure which is using the wide range of staff skills, including those of teaching assistants, to the best effect. Leaders are encouraged to develop innovation and enjoyment in learning, to which they are responding with vigour and enthusiasm. These improvements and aspirations demonstrate that the school has developed well, and continues to develop, 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

Rodney Braithwaite
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Provide pupils with better guidance on how to improve their work in mathematics and give them more opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems.
- Make better use of data on pupils' progress to identify those who are not making the progress they should, so that teachers can then target work more accurately to their needs.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching by clearly identifying areas for improvement when checking lessons.