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Mrs G Leonard  
Headteacher  
Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery  
The Brow  
Watford  
WD25 7NX

Dear Mrs Leonard

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 26 May 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 members of the governing body and to the School Improvement Partner for their contribution to the inspection.

There have been many staff changes since the last inspection, with six teachers having left and been replaced. The headteacher is due to retire at the end of this term and a new headteacher has been appointed for September. Plans to establish supportive links with Parmiters School, a local secondary school which is soon to gain academy status, are well advanced.

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

The school's data from termly assessments show that more pupils in each year group are reaching the levels of attainment expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Results for pupils in Year 6 this year are predicted to be close to national figures and better than previous years. However, attainment in mathematics is still below expected levels in some year groups, especially for girls. It is below expectations in reading and writing for boys in other year groups. Data on the progress pupils make is encouraging. The majority of pupils make at least expected progress and some are making huge strides to catch up on previous gaps in their learning. The current Year 6 pupils, for example, have made good progress during Key Stage 2. Importantly, the school's system for tracking pupils' progress, which

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has developed considerably since the last inspection, ensures that senior leaders recognise and analyse variations in pupils' performance. It also ensures that the governing body has more detailed information on which to question and challenge the school's leaders.

Termly meetings to discuss the progress of individual pupils ensure that gaps are identified quickly so that appropriate levels of support and challenge can be provided. Although senior leaders are making better use of performance data to evaluate the attainment of different groups of pupils, they do not analyse the data on pupils' progress as fully as they could. Variations in the progress of boys, girls, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are analysed termly. However, the progress of other groups, such as pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, or those whose attendance is low, is not analysed systematically or as frequently.

The school has made good use of support from local authority consultants who have provided whole-staff training on 'dynamic teaching', curriculum planning and the use of assessment. Individual teachers have had support to improve their practice through support from an advanced skills teacher. The School Improvement Partner provides the school with a good level of challenge.

Actions taken to improve the quality of pupils' writing are beginning to bear fruit. Curriculum planning has developed securely to ensure that themed weeks and visits to places of interest provide a relevant, first-hand stimulus for writing. As a result, opportunities for pupils to experience writing in a range of styles and for different purposes and to increase the length and depth of writing have increased. Such activities elicit a positive response from pupils who work hard, behave well and are keen to do their best. Teachers focus closely on developing features of good writing, particularly on developing vocabulary. This has a positive impact on pupils' use of interesting and imaginative vocabulary. Most classrooms have displays of key words to support pupils' work but the environment for learning does not encourage pupils' independence. Although improvements can be seen in the content of pupils' writing, weaknesses in their handwriting, presentation and spelling speak of insufficiently high expectations. Pace is an issue for some pupils, whose poor spelling strategies interrupt the flow of their written work.

A series of brief observations of teaching and learning, conducted with the headteacher, confirmed her view of the strengths and weaker aspects of provision. The inconsistencies in practice I noted have implications for the rigour and frequency with which senior leaders monitor provision to ensure that expected standards are maintained and that staff are adhering to agreed policies on marking and target setting. Inconsistencies remain in the quality of marking, notably in how well teachers guide pupils on what and how to improve their writing. Individual target setting is not working consistently as teachers are not following up pupils' targets rigorously. Targets are not derived systematically from teachers' marking or from pupils' self-assessment. The latter is an increasingly effective strategy for raising

pupils' understanding of their own learning as they identify for themselves how they could improve their work.

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

Jane Wotherspoon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of pupils' writing by ensuring that:
  - they are given motivating tasks that enable them to develop the full range of writing skills
  - tasks are presented in ways that enable them to produce the best writing of which they are capable at that stage of their development
  - older and more able pupils are given more opportunities to write at length, enabling them to develop writing styles that are appropriate to the subject and audience for whom they are writing.
  
- Improve the quality of curriculum planning to ensure that:
  - pupils' weaker performance is addressed rapidly and effectively
  - the organisation and structure of lessons, and links across subjects, make certain that learning opportunities are not lost.
  
- Improve the impact of monitoring pupils' progress by:
  - rigorously scrutinising assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to focus teaching appropriately
  - ensuring that marking and other guidance consistently shows pupils how to improve their work.