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21 June 2011

Mrs G James  
Headteacher  
St Mary's CofE VA Primary School  
Ladywell Road  
Tunstall  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST6 5DE

Dear Mrs James,

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Mary's CofE VA Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the staff, members of the governing body and pupils who were so keen to talk to me.

Since the last full inspection, refurbishment of almost the entire school has been on-going and is due for completion in October 2011. There have been a significant number of staffing changes, including the appointment of three newly qualified teachers.

As a result of the inspection on 4 November 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 purposeful and dynamic leadership of the headteacher and other senior leaders identified at the time of the last full inspection continues unabated. Weaker teaching has been tackled and eliminated. A rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and learning is fully embedded. Identified shortcomings have been tackled through a comprehensive programme of professional development with effective support from the local authority. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved significantly. All of this demonstrates how a much better capacity for sustained improvement has been achieved by the leadership. School assessment data shows, and inspection evidence confirms, that the rate of pupils' progress and the quality of their learning is accelerating rapidly and securely. Since the last full inspection, pupils' attainment has improved significantly in English and mathematics to broadly average levels in both subjects by the end of Key Stage 2. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of those who speak English as an additional language is also improving rapidly because of the effective support they receive.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The pupils say that lessons are much more enjoyable and that they are enjoying school much more. They have positive attitudes to learning. This is seen in pupils' much improved attendance and the dramatic decline in levels of persistent absence. The work of the very able home school link worker with potentially vulnerable pupils and their families has been pivotal in improving attendance and reducing levels of persistent absence.

Since the last full inspection, the school has developed highly effective systems to ensure that pupils' progress is tracked and monitored continually. Assessment data is used astutely to identify gaps in pupils' learning and tackle them on an individual basis. Teachers understand fully the progress expected of pupils and, as a result, they are much better at planning activities and tasks that help pupils meet expectations. The level of challenge in lessons has risen, especially for higher attaining pupils, although occasionally tasks for lower attaining pupils are too difficult. Pupils are acutely aware of their targets. They assess their own performance and progress regularly. Marking is consistently of a very high quality, ensuring pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

Teaching is well-planned and consistently lively. Pupils are much more actively involved in their own learning. Practical tasks form the basis of most teaching and learning. For example, a Key Stage 2 lesson on evacuees in World War 2 was brought vividly to life by the teacher acting the role of a farmer (including dressing up appropriately!) and responding to pupils' probing questions about what kind of evacuee he was ideally looking for. The pupils' understanding and insight into the life of evacuated children was both meaningful and deep as a result. Progress was good.

Since the last full inspection, the school has invested heavily in information and communication technology (ICT). There is a laptop computer for each Key Stage 2 pupil in every classroom. Pupils say that the computers are used very regularly in lessons across a wide range of subjects. Consequently, pupils' ICT skills have improved considerably. The regular use of ICT has enhanced pupils' independent learning and research skills significantly. Pupils say that teachers now talk less in lessons and expect pupils to learn more by themselves. This was certainly borne out during observations carried out during the monitoring inspection.

Staff are making effective use of the much improved facilities in the refurbished areas of the school. This is especially apparent in the vibrant Early Years Foundation Stage where children get off to a flying start. The reputation of the school is growing quickly in the local community. There is now a waiting list to join the Early Years Foundation Stage.

This is a school with a genuine sense of purpose. The headteacher provides it with a sharp and unrelenting focus on improvement. The sense of teamwork across the school is strong. The governing body is very supportive and knowledgeable.

Procedures for safeguarding pupils are comprehensive. Checks on adults working with children are carried out meticulously.

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

Mr Stephen Wall  
**Additional Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place 4 Nov 2009**

- Raise standards in English and mathematics by:
  - increasing opportunities for pupils to practise these skills, particularly writing, across other subjects in the curriculum
  - improving attendance.
- Ensure that the level of challenge is appropriate for all pupils in lessons, particularly for those capable of reaching higher levels, by:
  - using assessment information more effectively in day-to-day planning
  - linking curriculum planning more closely to information about pupils' progress.
- Encourage the development of independent learning skills by:
  - increasing opportunities for pupils to explore ideas for themselves
  - providing more activities during which they can work independently of the teacher.