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13 October 2011

Mrs M Slymn
Headteacher
St James CofE (VC) Primary School
Brook End
Longdon
WS15 4PL

Dear Mrs Slymn

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St James CofE (VC) Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 October 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 staff and pupils, and the Chair of the Governing Body who contributed to the inspection.

Since the previous inspection the school has been subject to a redundancy process resulting in the restructuring of leadership and management. An acting deputy headteacher was appointed for the summer term pending a permanent position from September 2011. Since Easter 2011, the headteacher has combined her duties with a small teaching commitment. Changes in staffing have been significant in this four-class primary school. A local authority consultant has worked in the school for one day per week to gain teaching experience and to contribute to developments in modern foreign languages and information and communications technology.

As a result of the inspection on 16 June 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.

In 2010, pupils in Year 6 did not make the progress expected given their above average starting points at the end of Key Stage 1. Differences were evident between girls and boys. Girls exceeded national averages in English and mathematics; attainment for boys was average in English but below average in mathematics. Too few pupils gained the expected Level 4 in English and mathematics. Unvalidated Key Stage 2 results for 2011 indicate that pupils' achievement has improved. Attainment is above average in English and mathematics for both boys and girls, representing a



marked improvement. Year 6 pupils made the progress expected from their starting points with 92% of pupils attaining Level 4 in both English and mathematics. Fewer pupils than predicted attained Level 5 in both subjects. This shows that the school has further to go to ensure that more-able pupils are all doing as well as they should.

These improvements are due to a range of initiatives, driven by the headteacher, linked to literacy, assessment, teaching and curriculum planning. The quality of progress tracking has improved. Half-termly progress meetings scrutinise pupils' progress and identify strategies for pupils falling behind. The moderation of pupils' work and regular assessment weeks are strengthening the accuracy of teachers' assessment and building staff confidence. Changes this year have placed a greater emphasis on tracking the progress of different groups of pupils to strengthen the school's work on promoting equality. Teachers are using a wider set of tools to assess pupils' progress in reading. A skills ladder in writing is helping pupils to review their progress. A termly piece of writing is used to aid moderation and assure the accuracy of teachers' assessments, and to improve the tracking of progress over time. However, there are too few opportunities for extended writing across the wider curriculum.

The school has set as a high priority improving the quality of teaching and learning through training, modelling and monitoring, particularly in literacy. The headteacher has taken crucial steps to improve the consistency of teachers' planning, including their use of assessment information, with effective support from the local authority. In the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was at least satisfactory, with many good features. Teachers are increasingly sharing the purpose of lessons with pupils. This was particularly successful in a literacy lesson, where the teacher had high expectations and challenged pupils to create an image of Pompeii using their five senses. Pupils were engrossed in the task and challenged each other to identify exciting words for writing. Effective use of modelling for the whole class prepared the pupils well for independent learning. Another strength in teaching is the focus on different strategies that pupils can choose for their learning, for example, methods of calculation in numeracy. This is helping pupils to think carefully, and to make decisions about their learning.

Lessons are characterised by good behaviour, excellent relationships, and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils work well in groups and respond well to a classroom ethos that promotes the sharing of learning. Where learning slows, it is because pupils have to listen to the teacher for too long without an opportunity for interaction. Although teachers routinely plan tasks for different ability groups of learners, the match is not always precise enough to meet individual learning needs. The use of learning and personal targets is developing to enable pupils to take greater responsibility for their learning. Given the changes in staffing, further work is planned to embed and share the school's best practice.

This year, curriculum time has been designated for phonic work and guided reading to consolidate developments. A priority to develop a creative curriculum is appropriate to enable pupils to develop and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

The headteacher has been successful in building a cohesive and committed team during a period of rapid change. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory and improving. Performance is now carefully analysed so that teachers are held to account for pupils' progress. This means that staff are taking responsibility for raising standards, and rates of progress are improving as a result. The restructuring of roles and responsibilities is increasing the opportunity for the headteacher to delegate and distribute quality assurance activities. A rolling programme has been appropriately set to prioritise time to review and evaluate different subject areas.

Self-evaluation procedures are not sufficiently embedded to cover all aspects of the school's work. This is evident in the decline in pupils' attendance from above average at the time of the last inspection. Decisive action has now been taken to tackle this. Given the turbulence in staffing in recent years, the quality of self-evaluation has not developed sufficiently to identify precisely the aspects to be improved. This means that, although priorities are identified in the school improvement plan, action plans are often too general and not sharply focused with measurable success criteria to track progress.

Since the inspection, the governing body has increased its involvement with the school through links with teachers and subject areas. There is a greater awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development. This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures by scrutinising the single central record and found this to be secure.

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

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 16–17 June 2010

- Accelerate the progress of all pupils in writing, especially that of more-able pupils by ensuring:
 - assessment information is used rigorously to plan activities that meet the needs of all pupils so that more-able pupils receive challenging activities in lessons
 - pupils are provided with clear guidance about how to succeed in a lesson, and how to improve their work through oral and written feedback
 - teachers provide guided writing sessions for all ability groups within each class
 - half-termly meetings are held to check pupils' progress, then swiftly taking any necessary action and holding staff accountable for the progress of the pupils.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership by:
 - agreeing a school improvement plan which provides clear guidance about key priorities, how and when actions will take place, alongside rigorous evaluation of the impact of actions taken
 - ensuring regular monitoring and evaluation activities take place to check agreed practices are implemented
 - developing the governing body's role of challenging leadership at all levels about school improvement.