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Harvey Sarai
Headteacher
Stow Heath Infant School, Nursery and Resource Area
Vaughan Road
Portobello
Willenhall
WV13 3UD

Dear Mrs Sarai

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Stow Heath Infant School, Nursery and Resource Area

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 22 February 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the members of the governing body who came in to meet me and to the pupils who talked with me.

Since the last inspection in July 2010, three new members of staff have been appointed. The school is preparing to merge with the adjacent junior school in September 2012. Since the start of this school year, the previous headteacher has become the acting headteacher at the junior school, and the deputy headteacher has become the acting headteacher in the infant school.

As a result of the inspection on 7 and 8 July 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.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Teacher assessments for 2011 and pupils' current work confirm that all pupils are making at least satisfactory progress with an increasing number making good progress. Overall attainment in 2011 was broadly average, as it was in 2010, and much improved on the previous four years. Considerable improvements in writing have led to closing the gap in attainment when compared with national averages, especially for White British boys and more able pupils. Attainment in writing is now just above the national average. Evidence in pupils' books and in lessons confirms this picture, with pupils being given good opportunities for writing across the

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curriculum. Consistently good teaching in Year 2 has supported this improvement. Pupils write about different parts of London, write prayers and tell the reader how to make a pizza. They enjoy using their literacy skills in a range of settings but do not get as many opportunities to use their numeracy skills in other subjects. As a result, progress in mathematics has not been as marked as that in writing, although attainment is average, and is identified for further development in the school's improvement plan. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including those pupils in the Resource Area, make good progress in their learning and often achieve well. This is because the help they receive is very regular, well targeted and delivered by experienced practitioners. The same is also the case for pupils for whom English is an additional language as they get good support from their start in the Nursery. Children make steady progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage from a starting point where their skills are below those expected for children of their age nationally. The school assesses their levels of skills accurately and tracks their progress well.

The quality of teaching

Teaching and learning is typically satisfactory overall. It is strengthening as a result of a wide range of monitoring and support activities, with a higher proportion of good teaching than at the last inspection. Around half of the teaching is good, with some examples of outstanding practice. The leadership's detailed monitoring leads to good advice being given to help teachers improve. Assessment information is now used more effectively by senior leaders and class teachers to take account of the varying abilities of pupils, so that they can be more regularly challenged. As a result, the achievement of more able pupils is improving. Teaching is characterised by good relationships and good use of additional classroom support. This is seen in well-organised daily phonic teaching where, in small groups, pupils are working at levels very appropriate to their needs. This is gradually having a positive effect on standards in reading. Pupils have targets for both literacy and numeracy, are aware of them and work hard to meet them. Marking of work is much more consistent, with the school's approach of 'two stars and a wish', which recognises two good features then suggests one improvement, in place in all classes. Teaching is typically most successful when teachers keep track of progress during lessons using a range of questions targeted at different groups. This was evident in a numeracy lesson in which pupils were using positional words following practice in ordering numbers. In the same lesson, activities were modelled well by the teacher, enabling pupils to get on with their work immediately. Teachers successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies, diversity days and visits to museums and galleries. They give pupils time to reflect on what they have seen and write about their visits, making good use of their improving writing skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour throughout the school remains good with some examples of exemplary behaviour. In their responses to the school's questionnaires, parents agree that this is the case. Pupils care about their school and community. They say emphatically that they feel safe in school and that there is no intimidating behaviour or bullying



The school's behaviour management policy is consistently applied and clearly understood by pupils and parents alike. The good behaviour in classes ensures that little or no time is wasted, that pupils are keen to work and show good attitudes to their work. This supports their learning well. The school has worked consistently with parents and carers to improve attendance, which for many years has been well below the national average. Improvements since the last inspection have resulted in attendance now being broadly average, with less lateness and fewer cases of persistent absenteeism.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The new leadership team, gaining much from the ambition and drive of the acting headteacher, has put in place a wide range of strategies for improvement. Together with earlier strategies, the school is now beginning to reap some benefits and leaders at levels demonstrate a determination build on this success. Improvements in attendance, writing especially for White British boys and a greater proportion of pupils working at Level 3 are evident. New teachers have settled into the school, are well supported and are making good progress in their practice. This gives the school a sense of purpose at a time when a merger of schools might well have distracted the school's vision. The leadership team regularly monitors progress in relation to the school's priorities and keeps the governing body informed of changes and improvements. The governing body has a realistic view of the school and, while it already challenges and supports the school from information it receives, it is now beginning the process of finding information by its own more regular monitoring. Safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements, are reviewed and updated regularly. Child protection procedures are good and staff are well trained in first aid. The local authority adviser has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and is providing effective support.

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 July 2010

- Raise attendance by broadening still further its strategies to engage parents of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Raise the quality of teaching and improve the progress of pupils, particularly in Years 1 and 2, so that all groups of pupils, including White British boys and the more able, achieve as well as they can by:
 - using assessment information more effectively to ensure a better match of work to the ability of pupils, particularly the more able
 - developing targets and effective marking to help pupils understand their next steps in learning
 - using the curriculum to engage all groups of pupils, so that they enjoy practising their core skills of literacy and numeracy.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - involving leaders and managers at all levels in focussing on major priorities to ensure a more consistent approach in making sustained improvements in provision and progress
 - ensuring that monitoring relates to the school's priorities and, in particular, evaluating the quality of pupils' learning.