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4 December 2013

Helen Pearcey  
Headteacher  
St James Primary School  
Great Charles Street  
Walsall  
WS8 6AE

Dear Miss Pearcey

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the action plan clearly identifies who is responsible for undertaking each action and who is responsible for monitoring the outcome
- make sure that feedback to staff after monitoring activities includes specific information about the progress of groups of pupils, particularly the more able.
- ensure that governors are fully involved in finding out for themselves the impact of the improvement work being undertaken.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, four representatives of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Together we made short visits to each classroom to talk to children and to look at the work in their books. The school action plan was evaluated along with a range of other documents relating to school improvement.

## **Context**

There have been no changes to staffing or governance since the last inspection.

## **Main findings**

The school development plan has been amended to include the specific areas for development identified in the recent inspection. Appropriate actions are identified in order to address these issues; however the plan does not state precisely who is responsible for the improvement work or who will monitor the impact of the actions taken. Governors are not included in the monitoring activities.

A range of training is in place to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching. Visits to other schools to observe good and outstanding practice have begun and each teacher has been provided with a programme of professional development to meet their individual needs. It is too soon to identify the impact of these actions.

Senior leaders undertake a range of monitoring activities to judge the quality of teaching however these are not sufficiently focussed on the areas identified for improvement in the recent inspection to ensure that consistency is achieved quickly. The feedback provided to staff following monitoring does not always include specific references to the progress made by groups of pupils.

Evidence from my visits to classes showed that work is generally well matched to the needs of most learners. However in some classes more able pupils are not being provided with work that is challenging enough. For example during the Year 5 and 6 mathematics lessons some pupils were accessing applications on iPads that did not challenge their mathematical thinking and were not suitably linked to the work they had completed in the main part of the lesson.

Teachers have received guidance about deploying teaching assistants effectively during lessons. In my visits to classrooms, I observed a number of teaching assistants effectively engaged in supporting groups of pupils. They were clear about the purpose of the task and the intended outcomes for the pupils.

Governors offer a good level of challenge to school based on the information that the headteacher provides. Although they visit school regularly, they do not focus their monitoring closely enough on the priorities outlined in the school development plan. Governors are planning to create their own monitoring plan in order to address this.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The headteacher has organised to use the support of a local headteacher network to provide some external validation of the school's monitoring activities.

The local authority has offered a range of support, including joint monitoring activities, however these are yet to take place. A training session for teachers on how to using questioning more effectively is planned for January 2014.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**