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25 March 2014

Mrs Julie Barke  
Headteacher  
St James CofE VA Primary School  
Harlestone Road  
St James  
Northampton  
NN5 7AG

Dear Mrs Barke

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

Following my visit to your school on 24 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 January 2014. 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.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. During the visit, you joined me on a tour of the school where I spoke with pupils informally and looked at their work. I also scrutinised a selection of pupils' books. The school action plan was evaluated and I scrutinised additional school information. The single central record was checked.

## **Context**

There have been no significant changes since the section 5 inspection.

## **Main findings**

Although it has been a short time since your last inspection, it is clear you and the school team are determined to raise the achievement of the pupils. You have acted quickly to address the issues identified in your recent inspection report. Your school action plan has clear milestones for improving the outcomes for pupils. Your plan identifies how governors link to areas for improvement. However, not all actions have success criteria that are sharp enough for the governing body to hold you to account with sufficient rigour.

You have improved the quality of teaching by ensuring teachers plan more closely to meet the needs of all pupils. You have ensured teachers are more flexible in planning learning opportunities. They adapt their teaching better as they identify pupils' needs in lessons. The interventions you have put in place to meet pupils' needs are timelier and address their needs quickly so that they are able to progress at faster rates. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating across the school in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Since the inspection you have raised expectations of how often pupils write within the subjects they study. You have identified more opportunities for them to write at length. Pupils' books demonstrate that since the inspection they have increased the amount of work they are doing. As a result of this, the quality of their work is improving because pupils have greater opportunities to practise their writing skills and they are making better progress. However, not all teachers expect the same quality in presentation in pupils' books and work is sometimes untidy.

The governing body has changed its expectation of what pupils can achieve and governors are determined to challenge school leaders to ensure all pupils have better outcomes. As a result, they are meeting regularly with senior and middle leaders and challenging them to explain about the progress of different groups of pupils. The governing body has reviewed its organisation and introduced a clerk to minute all key governing body meetings. Consequently, governors say they are able to concentrate fully on the key information and challenge senior leaders about the impact of their actions.

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 local authority has acted quickly to identify a National Leader of Governance to support the governing body to improve its work. An external review has already

begun but is in its early stages. The local authority has also arranged for a partner headteacher, who has a proven track record in school improvement, to support senior leaders and governors to review the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of writing. It has commissioned training for members of the governing body to improve their ability to challenge school leaders and to sharpen its systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Jan Connor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**