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20 October 2014

Miss Linda Pennington  
Headteacher  
Alexandra Infants' School  
Melville Road  
Normacot  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST3 4PZ

Dear Miss Pennington

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alexandra Infants' School, Stoke-On-Trent**

Following my visit to your school on 17 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 June 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. The school should take further action to:

- work with the support of the local authority to appoint appropriately qualified and skilled teachers and bring stability to the staffing structure
- ensure that improvement plans show how leaders and governors will evaluate whether the actions taken have been successful in improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with four governors including the

Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I made brief visits to lessons and considered a number of documents and a sample of pupils' books.

## **Context**

At the time of my visit, five of the seven classes were being taught by temporary staff. This is partly because of absence due to ill health and partly because the school has struggled to recruit suitable permanent staff. The deputy headteacher is currently absent due to ill health and will retire at the end of the autumn term. The school has not yet been successful in appointing a replacement.

## **Main findings**

The staffing instability noted in the previous inspection report has continued and is having a detrimental impact on the school's ability to improve rapidly. Currently, five of the seven classes are being taught by temporary teachers. The report from the June inspection recommended that the deputy's 'exemplary practice' in teaching should be shared across the school but this has not been possible as the deputy has been absent due to ill health since early September.

You and the governors are acutely aware of need to bring stability to the staffing structure and are working very closely with the local authority to explore a number of options. The local authority has recognised the particular challenges facing the school as a result of staffing difficulties and has seconded a successful senior leader to strengthen the school leadership team.

These serious staffing issues have not stopped you and other leaders from tackling weaknesses in teaching and in pupils' behaviour and attendance and you are determined that the necessary improvements are made quickly so that Alexandra Infants once more becomes a good school. Your improvement plan covers all the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection and sets out the actions that you intend to take. However, the plans do not always show how you will evaluate whether the actions taken have been successful in raising standards.

Leaders are making more frequent checks on the work of teachers by visiting lessons, evaluating teachers' lesson plans and looking at pupils' books. You keep careful records of these checks and of the findings and recommendations for improvement. However, you do not always record how and when leaders will check that the necessary changes have been made.

You have set ambitious targets for improvement in pupils' attainment and have established effective systems for collecting and analysing information about pupils' progress. Leaders have previously met with class teachers every term to discuss the progress of pupils in their class but recognise that this is not frequent enough to

quickly identify and tackle underachievement. You now rightly plan to hold these meetings each half term

Since September you have provided further opportunities for teachers, including temporary staff, to work together to ensure that they are all able to make accurate judgements about the standards of pupils' work. You have also provided additional training for teaching assistants to make sure that they become skilled in supporting pupils' reading and recording helpful comments about how effectively pupils are using the strategies they have been taught.

The information that you gather about pupils' achievement confirms that many pupils' have weak language skills. You have ensured that there is a strong focus within the curriculum on speaking and listening and are in the process of appointing an additional bi-lingual teaching assistant to provide particular support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Since September you have renewed your efforts to improve attendance. Governors have taken a more active role and now send out regular newsletters with weekly attendance and punctuality information for each class. A governor now attends meetings with parents to discuss the importance of good attendance. The school's attendance officer makes checks on the attendance of different groups of pupils, particularly those with the lowest attendance. The school has purchased additional support from the local authority educational welfare officer to ensure that absences can be followed up promptly and rigorously. A new reward system for good attendance has been well received by pupils who are keen to spend their points in the 'attendance shop'. These changes have resulted in improved attendance during the first weeks of the school year, although overall attendance remains below the average nationally.

You have taken decisive action to improve pupils' behaviour. The local authority behaviour support team carried out an audit of behaviour at the end of the summer term and you have used the findings and recommendations to review the school behaviour policy and introduce a new behaviour management system. In September, you arranged training in behaviour management for all staff, including lunchtime staff and administration staff. A meeting was held for parents and letters have been sent home to ensure that all parents understand the new approaches to both behaviour and attendance. Assemblies have been used to ensure that pupils understand the new expectations, rewards and sanctions. In addition, several members of staff have attended specialist training to develop their skills when working with the very small number of pupils who have particularly challenging behaviour. You have also started recording and analysing information about incidents of poor behaviour and these records show a declining number of incidents since September. You now intend to refine your recording system to include more information so that you can analyse the types and possible causes of different incidents as well as the impact of different management strategies.

Governors have a clear understanding of the school's current position and of the need for rapid improvement. They are frustrated by the staffing difficulties facing the school but are committed to finding a solution as soon as possible. Governors are being proactive in working with leaders to improve attendance. Minutes of their meetings show that governors ask you questions about how improvements will be made but governors say they would welcome additional training to enable them to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to school leaders.

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 is providing a high level of support to this school. The school improvement advisor makes regular visits to the school and has a very clear understanding of the school's current position and in particular the need for stability in staffing. As well as providing a seconded senior leader, the local authority is working with you and governors to explore ways of working in partnership with other schools to ease recruitment issues and to provide long term support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel

**Her Majesty's Inspector**