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10 October 2016

Ms Lorna Harvey  
St James Primary School  
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West Midlands  
WS8 6AE

Dear Ms Harvey

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

Following my visit to your school on 20 September 2016, 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- consolidate improvements to teaching and pupil outcomes by raising the profile of reading and raise standards in both reading and writing
- build on the strong links that the staff have established with parents and carers so that parents are more involved in their children's education, in particular helping to reinforce the work that the school is doing to improve disadvantaged pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills
- maintain the focus on the broader curriculum so that it develops pupils' understanding of major religions, faiths, cultures and customs that exist in Britain.

## **Evidence**

In addition to visiting lessons and holding meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the teacher responsible for managing early years provision, I spoke with some parents at the start of the inspection and held a telephone conversation with one of the local authority's school improvement partners. I also met with the two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I had lunch with some pupils to discuss their views about the school and their behaviour and safety. The school's improvement plans and its scrutiny of the actions taken to improve teaching and pupil outcomes were evaluated. I considered the school's self-review of its progress since the inspection in February 2016. I checked the most up-to-date attendance information and the school's single central record to judge the effectiveness of staff vetting and safeguarding procedures.

## **Context**

There have been staff changes over the last twelve months. Most notably, the deputy headteacher joined in September 2016. However, she started working with the school in April 2016, as she was seconded by a local teaching school to focus on improving teaching and learning.

## **Main findings**

You, the deputy headteacher and governors have effective strategic plans in place to guide leaders and staff towards sustained improvement. The school's action plans identify the right priorities for improvement to pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The deputy headteacher has been particularly effective in helping you to monitor the quality of teaching and improve teaching and pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Together, you and the deputy headteacher evaluate accurately the impact of actions taken to raise standards. Senior leaders carry out rigorous checks of teaching, pupils' work and progress, which accounts for your accurate assessment of improvement since the previous inspection.

Since the inspection in February 2016, you and the early years leader have taken prompt and effective action to improve provision in the Nursery. The redeployment of effective teaching and support staff and a major overhaul of the physical environment and resources are having a positive impact on Nursery provision for both two- and three-year-olds. The early years leader and senior staff have put in place effective monitoring and support, which has improved teaching in the Nursery. Early years children continue to do well in the Reception Year. The most recent assessment information for 2016 shows that a significant proportion of children currently in Year 1 (63%) reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. This is the third consecutive year of improvement and a sustained rise in the proportion of children reaching this standard.

The curriculum is being reviewed and the deputy headteacher has supported the introduction of a consistent way of planning mathematics lessons. You have made

sure that new staff are monitored and supported. Professional development and training, for example with new ways of teaching mathematics, are having a positive impact on the consistency of teaching and learning across classes. Robust monitoring of lessons and pupils' work enables you and your leaders to provide feedback to teachers which is helpful and informative. Any underperformance by teachers or support staff is identified and followed up to make sure that staff improve their practice. There is strong leadership in key stage 1, backed up by some exemplary practice in Year 2. This outstanding practice is being shared across classes and is having a positive impact on improving pupils' vocabulary and writing skills.

It is not possible to compare the most recent national test results (2016) for pupils in Year 6 as this was the first year that the revised national curriculum tests were administered and there are different attainment criteria compared to the previous years' tests. However, you and your deputy headteacher have analysed the results of this year's assessments of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar, and attainment and progress in mathematics. These results point to increasing rates of progress in relation to pupils' different starting points. Other assessment information for each year group points to evidence of improvement, although at the time of this inspection there is no comparison with national figures to judge how well pupils' progress compares with other schools.

You have an effective pastoral inclusion team, ably led by an inclusion manager who works with staff to liaise with and support vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils and families. Pupil premium funding is being used effectively to target disadvantaged pupils. The funding is used to deploy family support and welfare staff to work with vulnerable families and this is having a significant impact on improving attendance rates in most year groups. In addition, persistent absence rates have halved this year compared with the same point in time last year. It is also significant that assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are catching up on the progress that other pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics, although, without national figures, it is difficult to establish whether these differences are diminishing quickly enough.

You and your deputy headteacher have introduced 'behaviour for learning profiles' which help teachers and supervisory staff to reward good behaviour and to record how well pupils behave in relation to a scale of criteria numbered one to six. This behaviour ladder aims to modify and improve learning behaviour in particular. This has brought greater consistency to the way pupils' behaviour is managed. There are early signs that this is working, as there has been a significant reduction in the number of incidents that have escalated to temporary or permanent exclusion. The system has also helped you and your staff to monitor and log behaviour incidents more consistently. The pupils I spoke to at lunchtime were very much in favour of this system and understand how it helps them and other pupils to behave well.

You are in the early stages of implementing what you call a 'challenge curriculum'. You explained very clearly that this aims to broaden the learning experiences of pupils so that they cover a range of stimulating and interesting topics and themes. It is right that you are pulling this together by checking that all subjects of the national curriculum and the core skills that pupils need to learn in these subjects are listed alongside each theme or topic. There is now scope to build on this by making sure that pupils develop more understanding and an appreciation of different cultures and backgrounds, and an understanding of major religions, faiths and cultural traditions. British values of democracy, tolerance and respect for law and order are embedded very well in the culture of the school and its curriculum.

Pupils make relatively slower progress in reading compared with writing. Teachers are more successful in promoting pupils' independent writing, as the curriculum includes more opportunities for pupils to write across a range of subjects and topics. However, it is clear from the different rate of progress between reading and writing that pupils may not be reading enough challenging or varied books and texts. Leaders and staff recognise this and are refocusing their efforts by ensuring that pupils read regularly and widely. A good start has been made since the previous inspection. Early reading skills in the early years and key stage 1 are improving because there is now a consistent approach to teaching phonics.

### **External support**

There is a good balance of challenge and support provided by the local authority. The combination of support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner, other schools and networks, including work undertaken with a local teaching school, is helping leaders, teachers and governors to see and share good practice.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou

**Her Majesty's Inspector**