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Mr Paul Longden  
St James' CofE (C) Primary School  
Wolverley Crescent  
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Dear Mr Longden

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Wednesday 7 July 2010. I appreciated the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff and pupils for taking the time to talk to me.

As a result of the inspection on 25-26 January 2010, the school was asked to:

- improve attainment, especially in reading, writing and mathematics by:
  - improving attendance and punctuality
  - improving the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school by ensuring all teachers make better use of accurate assessment and tracking data to plan work with the appropriate level of challenge for all pupils
  - improving planning, resources and regular, child-initiated access for the outdoor curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage in order to further develop children's independent learning skills
  - strengthening leadership at all levels by reviewing responsibilities in order to secure improved outcomes for all pupils.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that, at this time, the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

School data show an improvement in the standards reached in reading, writing and mathematics but it is still variable across the school. At the end of Year 6, school data demonstrates that pupils' attainment exceeds the school's targets and is now broadly average. The number of pupils reaching the higher levels in English and mathematics has increased significantly. The underachievement identified in the



inspection is being addressed successfully and so the rate of progress is accelerating. In the lessons observed, most pupils were making at least satisfactory progress. As we discussed, this improved rate of progress has to be maintained to close the achievement gap as fast as possible. You are held in high regard by the senior staff and have successfully created a culture of accountability. All staff have a clear understanding of the part they play in school improvement. Pupils are closely tracked and interventions used where appropriate. Pupils value the small group work and say they are making better progress because of the targeted support they receive. In addition, the introduction of basic skills work is beginning to have a positive impact on reading, writing and mathematics. That said, the presentation of pupils' work, their spelling and handwriting are not good enough.

During the inspection, attendance was low. The new systems introduced by the attendance and punctuality leader have resulted in a major change. The latest attendance figure is average (94%). Rewards for attendance are having a positive impact. Pupils with 100% attendance are keen to receive their end-of-year prize. The number of latecomers has dropped significantly as a result of recent initiatives including the 'late gate'.

The school has rightly focused on improving the quality and consistency of teaching. You have communicated high expectations to all staff regarding the quality of teaching required. The introduction of a regular and rigorous monitoring programme and half-termly progress checks are holding staff to account for pupils' learning and progress. Intervention for those pupils who are underachieving is having a measureable impact. Clear criteria for successful lessons, together with regular discussion, provide a useful way of helping staff to account for pupils' performance throughout the school. All teachers identify the learning intention at the start of a lesson. Most planning has three distinct levels of differentiation but these are not always well matched to pupils' needs. This is because not all teachers have a secure grasp of each individual pupil's level of ability. There is still too much teaching that is no better than satisfactory and, as a result, progress is uneven.

Outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is much better. Children enjoy the range of activities on offer. However, these activities represent the minimum expected to deliver the early years entitlement. Children have helped to plan areas in the large, open space and more work is planned to develop a covered area and a stage for drama. On the day of the inspection, children were delighted to be playing outside in the new sandpit but there was no tracking of individual children's learning experiences. An appropriate level of staffing ensures children are well cared for but adults tend to direct children's learning and not enough child-initiated play is encouraged and developed.

Senior leaders are each responsible for a team, focusing on an area identified in the inspection report. As a result, there is more shared leadership and team leaders say they enjoy the freedom to lead. Monitoring and evaluating are more regular. For example, English and mathematics leaders scrutinise work books, check planning



and monitor the quality of marking. They lead staff meetings and provide useful guidance for staff. Consequently, there is a clearer understanding of what is expected. A recent 'away day' gave governors the opportunity to discuss their roles and responsibilities. They are supportive and beginning to challenge and hold the staff to account for pupils' achievement.

Over the past year, the school has received an appropriate level of support from the local authority. Since January 2010, the local authority's statement of action has been used to prioritise the support provided. The school adviser, Black Country Challenge adviser, English and mathematics consultants have all provided sound, targeted support. This has resulted in a clear, whole-school focus on raising achievement for all pupils.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Rockey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

