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Miss V. Bunce  
Headteacher  
Stow Heath Junior School  
Hill Road  
Portobello  
Willenhall  
WV13 3TT

Dear Miss Bunce

**Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Stow Heath Junior School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 29 November 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to staff, pupils, parents and representatives of the governing body and the local authority for taking the time to talk to me.

Since the school was inspected in March 2011, there has been considerable turmoil in staffing. At the time of the previous inspection, the headteacher was unwell and has subsequently resigned. An acting headteacher was appointed from a neighbouring school for the duration of the summer term. The local authority has proposed that the school merge with the adjacent infant school. Consequently, the headteacher of the infant school is now the acting headteacher. The first round of consultation to merge the two schools has been completed. Two members of staff are currently on long-term sick leave and, as a result, the deputy headteacher has taken on the role of the special educational needs coordinator. One member of staff is currently on adoption leave and one member of staff is on maternity leave. The school has two newly qualified teachers.

As a result of the inspection on 29 March 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains low but is beginning to improve. The latest school data indicate an improvement on the performance of Year 6. The school has begun to narrow the gap in pupils' attainment in English and mathematics. The school has made satisfactory progress in improving pupils' knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. Pupils' progress observed in English and mathematics lessons during the inspection was at least satisfactory. These improvements can be attributed to the substantial support teachers have received, particularly in improving pupils' understanding of how to spell accurately and improve their sentence construction. Consequently, pupils' spellings have begun to improve and teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to write at length. Pupils' understanding in mathematics has begun to improve. Support has been successful in helping teachers to develop good strategies when teaching mathematics. For example, pupils now have a better understanding of fractions and problem solving. The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved and they are now making at least satisfactory progress. The school has made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The deputy headteacher has used her knowledge and experience to ensure that teaching assistants understand their role and have received the appropriate training. Interventions are carefully planned and well matched to pupils' needs. All classes have special educational needs folders with detailed assessment information about individual pupils. Teachers use this information to plan effectively to meet pupils' individual needs. This helps pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to improve their work using special programmes.

Pupils' behaviour has improved and is satisfactory. Behaviour observed in lessons was cooperative. There is a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere in the school. Pupils said that they now felt much safer in school and that behaviour is better. The school recognises that small pockets of bullying still occasionally occur. Well thought through support is given to pupils when needed. Year 6 peer mentors are specially trained to help pupils at break and lunch times and to reduce problems in the playground. The school recognises that behaviour at lunchtime does not always reflect the high standards expected. The school is in the process of appointing two extra lunchtime supervisors to allay pupils' worries about lunchtime behaviour.

Teaching and learning have improved. The school has made good progress with this area for improvement. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing amount which is good or better. Teachers plan lessons well to take full account of pupils' different starting points. Pupils are clear about what they are going to learn in lessons and activities are better matched to pupils' needs. In good literacy lessons observed during the inspection, pupils had opportunities to work at higher levels. A greater proportion of pupils now know their learning targets. Marking is frequent and comments in books are positive and explain what pupils have done well.

Opportunities are missed to explain to pupils the next steps in learning. Staff sometimes explain what pupils need to do next, but they do not give opportunities for pupils to practise these skills soon afterwards. This slows pupils' learning. Strategies to help improve pupils' reading and writing are used well. Pupils explain how they help each other to use and read difficult words. Pupils are encouraged to keep word lists with definitions which they can then include in their own writing. Pupils are encouraged to improve their vocabulary. They are keen to read more regularly and they keep reading diaries. One boy was proud to have read 44 books since September. He explained that he was confidently choosing more demanding texts and enjoying them. Pupils are encouraged to work in pairs and groups. This was observed in a mathematics lesson where pupils were helped to solve more complex problems and confidently tackle challenging work. Pupils understand that there may be more than one way of solving problems in mathematics. Thus teachers are beginning to plan work which is more demanding.

The acting headteacher is working determinedly to help staff develop their teaching and learning skills. She understands the school well. The senior leadership team regularly monitor and evaluate the work of the school. They have a secure view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Performance management systems link closely to the developmental needs of staff and to the school's development plan. The school has used performance management to good effect in broadening staff's understanding of teaching and learning. As the senior team know the school well, this has enabled them to make effective use of support from the local authority. The school is aware that it has not had the opportunity to develop the role of middle managers or to hold teachers to account for the learning in their classrooms. The local authority has an effective action plan. It has worked closely with the school to ensure self-evaluation judgements are sound. The school has an accurate understanding of the progress it has made with regard to its key issues. In addition to the local authority consultants, the school has had effective support from a national and a local leader of education.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011**

- Close remaining gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching.
- Improve the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and others who find learning hard.