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Mrs R Johnson
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Johnson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Audlem St James' CE Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 February 2012, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Discussions with senior leaders and managers, members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a small group of parents and carers, the pupils and an officer from the local authority were also very helpful. Please pass on my thanks to all concerned for the time they gave to talk to me and for the welcome I received.

There has been considerable change to the school's context since the inspection in September 2010. An IEB was established in September 2011. The headteacher left the school in December 2011 and an interim headteacher took up post at the start of January 2012. She has been seconded to school until the end of the academic year. One teacher left the school in July 2011. Classes have been reorganised and most pupils are taught in mixed-age groups.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 September 2010, 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 has made inadequate progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is not improving quickly enough. The unvalidated test results for 2011 show that attainment declined at the end of Key Stage 2 and was much lower than the national average. Pupils' achievement in English, particularly writing, is weaker than mathematics. Attainment by the end of Year 2 is broadly average, although fewer pupils gained the higher levels in reading. From broadly average starting points, children made

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expected progress across Reception. In lessons, pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. However, the system for assessing and tracking the progress of this group is not precise enough to measure their progress against their individual targets. Consequently, school-based data indicate this group is making slower progress over time.

Inspection evidence shows a more positive picture with most pupils making at least expected progress across the autumn term. Nevertheless, this represents the minimum that many pupils are capable of achieving. As a result, attainment levels across the school are variable and some pupils, particularly those in Years 1, 2 and 5, are working below age-related expectations. Pupils are eager learners. They listen attentively, are willing to share their ideas and apply themselves well to tasks. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is based on a sound grasp of number. However, they have insufficient opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solve problems. There are greater opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills, but few have developed the stamina to write at length. Weak handwriting and spelling skills limit the achievement of some pupils.

The quality of teaching

Teachers are striving to implement up-to-date teaching strategies they have developed through whole-school training. Consequently, teachers plan interesting lessons and are beginning to use a greater range of resources to capture pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Teachers promote positive relationships and there are greater opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas in small groups before they begin independent tasks. Nonetheless, teaching is not consistently strong enough to raise pupils' achievement. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and assessment information is not always used with enough precision to match tasks to pupils' needs. This means some activities lack appropriate challenge and do not move pupils' learning on quickly enough.

Teachers ensure pupils know their targets for improvement. However, these are having limited impact in raising achievement because they are not precise enough to identify the small steps pupils need to make in their learning. Recent improvements to teachers' marking mean pupils have better guidance on how to improve their writing skills. This practice is less well developed in mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and show consideration to each other. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying rarely happens. Although there is occasional name-calling, pupils are confident that adults act swiftly to resolve any issues. Pupils think behaviour in the school is good. They say the new lunchtime system has improved pupils' behaviour. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected by their regular attendance and improving punctuality.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The interim headteacher has an astute and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the plans to address the shortcomings identified in the previous inspection are appropriate and well-focused. Her drive is effectively shared by the members of the IEB, who have been tenacious and decisive in their actions to improve outcomes for pupils. This group is providing a clear steer for the school's improvement and offering vigorous challenge to school leaders and managers.

Monitoring systems have improved and subject leaders have a greater role in checking the performance of the school. Through regular scrutiny activities, subject leaders know what needs to improve. Although they provide teachers with helpful guidance, this has not led to consistently better teaching across the school. Systems to monitor pupils' progress are stronger but the information they provide is not used with enough rigour to drive school improvement.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has a greater understanding of the role and is beginning to work in closer partnership with the Nursery staff to ensure consistent planning and expectations. The school's understanding of children's skills and knowledge when they enter Reception is much more secure because of stronger partnerships with private providers and parents and carers.

Much has been done to keep parents and carers informed of the changes in school during a challenging period. Communication is more frequent through a regular newsletter while members of the IEB offer fortnightly drop-in sessions and direct email links. The recent parents' meeting provided a vehicle to share and discuss plans for the next step of the school's journey. Parents and carers are generally positive about the changes and report that confidence levels in the school are rising. They mostly believe their suggestions are being listened to and acted upon. Some parents and carers raised issues they were not so content with. These have been shared with senior leaders and managers.

The support provided by the local authority has been robust and effective because it has been sharply focused on improving pupils' outcomes. The local authority has provided financial support and professional guidance to teachers, senior leaders and managers.

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

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2010

- Raise attainment to above average and accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring that average ability pupils in Key Stage 2 are sufficiently supported and effectively challenged to make good progress
 - improving boys writing and more-able pupils reading in Key Stage 1, by ensuring they are sufficiently challenged
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to speak and listen in lessons.

- Improve the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers make more effective use of assessment to inform pupils next steps in learning
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations and set aspirational targets which challenge every pupils.

- Enable leaders and managers at all levels to be more effective in driving improvement by:
 - increasing the rigour of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning
 - involving middle leaders more in checking on the school's performance.

- Improve children's outcomes to good in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - gaining a secure picture of the attainment of children entering Reception so that appropriately challenging tasks can be set
 - ensuring that those leading and managing the Early Years Foundation Stage have greater clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities.

- At the most senior level, for the school to engage more closely and positively with parents and carers and to take more account and act upon their suggestions and concerns.