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30 November 2012

Mrs R Jewitt
Headteacher
Audlem St James CE Primary School
Heathfield Road
Audlem
Crewe
CW3 0HH

Dear Mrs Jewitt

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Audlem St James CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Chair of the Shadow Governing Body. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority. HMI also met a group of pupils from different year groups. The school improvement plan (Raising Attainment and Achievement Plan) and other action plans were evaluated, along with several school documents, a sample of pupils' work and data regarding pupils' progress.

Context

Since the inspection in September, the Shadow Governing Body has agreed terms of reference and a committee structure in readiness to take over from the IEB in January 2013. The entrance area to the school has been restructured as has the area used by the nursery and reception year children.

Main findings

The outcomes of the inspection in September confirmed the school's self-evaluation of its effectiveness and where improvement was needed. The headteacher and Chair of the IEB were prompt to inform the parents of the implications of the findings from the inspection along with details of the actions taken and planned. Open communication has continued with email links, updating of the school's website, newsletters, information about class topics, workshops and the setting up of a Parent Forum. Governors' view is that parents' confidence in the school is rising.

Action since the inspection has built on that begun in previous terms; the headteacher is giving a determined, clear lead in ensuring that the school has all the necessary procedures and resources to bring about improvement. Her recent detailed report to the IEB highlights her awareness that the pace of improvement is highly dependent on new procedures and practices becoming firmly embedded. She has sensibly put some planned actions on hold. The Raising Attainment and Achievement Plan has been amended to reflect fully the areas for improvement in the inspection report. Action plans have also been compiled for reading, writing and mathematics. The latter has rightly been included as assessments of pupils' attainment this term point to some gaps in knowledge of and facility with number. In all the plans, the clarity of the actions to be taken is not always matched by success criteria that specify the expected outcomes for pupils, making it difficult to evaluate the impact.

The Chair of the IEB and Chair of the Shadow Governing Body have a good understanding of the issues facing the school. They are supporting and challenging the headteacher concerning pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. With advice from the local authority, they and the headteacher have agreed strategies to ensure the continuity and quality of provision for pupils in Years 3 and 4. Having worked alongside the IEB and participated in key functions, including the performance management of the headteacher, the Shadow Governing Body is well placed to assume full responsibility for governance in January 2013.

The headteacher has queried the accuracy of some previous assessments of pupils' attainment and progress and has introduced new assessment criteria and tracking systems. This has given a clear overview of those pupils who could be doing better.

Some key staff are relatively new to the school and others have taken on new areas of responsibility. The coordinator for special educational needs is being supported by a specialist from Nantwich Education in Partnership. All staff are aware, through performance management discussions, of what is expected of them in relation to pupils' progress and school improvement. Senior staff are taking a lead in developing professional knowledge, and in sharing effective classroom practice to develop pupils' independence in learning. Evidence from the headteacher's monitoring of teaching and planning shows that staff are acting on advice but that there are areas

of inconsistency, particularly in marking to help pupils to improve their performance and in the challenge for the more able pupils.

Productive steps have been initiated to develop pupils' writing skills. The visit of an author and the stimulus of the book 'Stanley's Stick' prompted writing that included mature vocabulary and phrasing. There is evidence of pupils extending their skills; pupils said that having success criteria helped them to know what to do. Staff are tackling gaps in pupils' knowledge of spelling and punctuation through regular focused sessions; there is scope to identify individual needs and to target support accordingly. Staff are also working to raise the profile of reading with an additional library area and a wider range of books. Training sessions by external consultants have heightened staff's awareness of how to structure the teaching of phonics.

The development of the outdoor classroom within the Early Years Foundation Stage has been planned in stages with the children involved in removing some of the flower tubs before other work begins. Staff have acted on advice from a local authority consultant to reorganise the indoors, open up the unit and give easy access to the different learning zones.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- sharpen improvement planning by linking the planned actions to success criteria linked to pupils' achievement
- pinpoint the gaps in pupils' knowledge of number, spelling and use of punctuation and provide targeted support
- enable staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to see best practice elsewhere in the use of indoor and outdoor space.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority continues to provide additional financial support, to provide specialist guidance, including training in governance, and to monitor the school's progress. The former executive headteacher is mentoring the headteacher.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East and as below.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector