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18 November 2014

Mrs Suzanne Mills  
Headteacher  
Frodsham Weaver Vale Primary School  
Ship Street  
Frodsham  
Warrington  
Cheshire  
WA6 7PZ

Dear Mrs Mills

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Frodsham Weaver Vale Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester**

Following my visit to your school on 17 November 2014, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- build on the early improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - ensuring the resources and activities in the Nursery are shaped more closely to the learning needs of the children
  - ensuring the outdoor environment is used to support children's learning more effectively in Nursery and Reception
- make sure teachers provide greater challenge for the most-able pupils so they are able to soar
- Develop your work on reducing pupil absence from school by paying greater attention to the attendance of different groups and put swift action in place when any gaps emerge.

## **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, two senior leaders, seven members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I chatted to a small group of older pupils to gain their views on the changes that have taken place since the last inspection. We visited each classroom to observe teaching, watch pupils at work and to check the quality of pupils' work in their books. Your most recent school data, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Years 2 and 6, were considered. I looked at records of your checks on teaching, your school improvement plan and documentation related to the work of the governing body.

## **Context**

A lot of change has taken place since my last visit. Eight members of staff have left the school in total. Three teachers left their post and have been replaced. Two of these new teachers joined the school at the start of the current school year. A learning mentor has been appointed and one teacher has recently taken on a temporary leadership role to drive improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The resource base provision for pupils with autism has been reorganised and is being led by a temporary teacher who is also the new special educational needs professional in the school. A senior leader from a local primary school was working alongside school leaders for a short period during the last academic year.

## **Main findings**

You are on the road to recovery, but your journey is far from complete. Time will tell if you are able to make the leap to good at the next inspection. The biggest barrier you continue to face is the chronic underperformance of too many pupils caused by weaker teaching in the past. As a result, there is still a way to go to make sure pupils at Weaver Vale do as well as they should for their age. Nonetheless, you are heading in the right direction and chipping away at historic weaknesses with a greater sense of urgency. Staff have turned a corner and share your aspirations for the pupils in their care. They no longer make excuses about pupils having too many barriers to succeed; they are seizing opportunities to help pupils overcome the hurdles that sometimes prevent them from making progress.

The messages I delivered when I last visited your school were not easy for anyone to hear. However, no-one quibbled; all set about tackling shortcomings with renewed energy and determination. You and the governors have been ruthless in thinking about what works well and what has not brought about success in the past. As a result, you have adapted school policies and teaching strategies until they are fit-for-purpose. This is beginning to reap rewards. For the first time in a long while, pupils made the progress they should and more pupils reached the levels expected for their age. Pupils achieved well in reading. Nevertheless, not enough pupils made better than expected progress in writing and mathematics and too few gained the higher levels. Consequently standards remain below the national average.

Your own data paints a positive picture and almost all are making the progress they should from their different starting points. You are successfully eradicating the bumpy ride pupils typically experienced as they moved from class-to-class. The chances of pupils doing well in one class, only to go backwards in the next are becoming a distant memory. This is because teaching is improving; you are keeping a sharp eye on pupils' progress and effective support strategies are triggered as soon as pupils fall behind. This is setting you up well for future success, as pupils are not constantly racing to catch up but can spend more time deepening and extending their learning.

Your views on teaching are accurate and the support teachers receive is matching their needs closely. You have the trust and confidence of senior leaders who have bought into your vision and your way of leading the school. They have upped their game too. In particular, the deputy headteacher is becoming an effective champion of teaching, leading the way with new teaching techniques and supporting other teachers to follow suit. As a result, you are no longer alone in shouldering the responsibility for turning the school around.

Improvements in teaching are evident in pupils' books. Gone are the days when poor presentation, unfinished work and weak basic skills were accepted as the best pupils could achieve. Teachers' marking is making a difference because they offer helpful advice and give pupils' time to reflect on their mistakes so they are less likely to repeat them over and over again. Teaching assistants, without exception, make a real difference to pupils' learning, through the support they provide during whole-class teaching sessions and the quality questions they ask during small group tasks.

The teaching of mathematics in some, but not all, classes is developing nicely because pupils are encouraged to put their learning into practice. Pupils are becoming fluent mathematicians who can use their number skills to solve challenging problems. They are increasingly able to reason and find solutions because they work systematically. Pupils' writing skills are better because they have more opportunity to write and they have the chance to redraft their work. This is giving them greater confidence; they are far more willing to put pen to paper because they know they have a chance to try out their ideas first. Although pupils are gaining the tools to write, not all are accomplished writers who produce work which captures the interest of the reader. Pupils' handwriting skills are beginning to improve, but their ability to spell correctly remains a whole-school weakness. Although improving there is still a way to go to make sure the most-able pupils receive the challenge they need to soar and reach the highest standards.

As you are beginning to make headway with the shortcomings identified by inspectors last year, other weaknesses are beginning to emerge. Too few children enter Reception ready to fly. Children enjoy their time in Nursery and recent improvements are helping to make their learning more purposeful. However, there is still a way to go to ensure activities and resources are shaped more closely to the learning needs of each child. Pupils' learning experiences outside the classroom are not exploited well enough in Nursery and Reception. Your focus on attendance has

led to positive improvement so far this term. This was not the case at the end of last year; far too many pupils did not attend school often enough.

Pupils have nothing but praise for their school and the changes you have brought about. They are keen to talk about their learning; they know their work is improving because they act on teachers' helpful guidance and advice. They have no complaints about behaviour, bullying or name-calling.

The governing body are becoming a formidable force. They are a shining example of success since the last inspection. They no longer operate as willing individuals but as a collective group, united in their desire to improve the school. An external review of governance helped to get them on the right track, but it is the strong leadership of the Chair which has kept them moving, at a pace, towards their ultimate goal. A skills audit means they know themselves well and they are taking on roles where they can offer valued expertise. Governors give their time generously because they take their responsibilities seriously and their commitment to the school is unwavering. They have attended extensive training which is serving them well in gaining an accurate view of the school. As a result, they are well informed and able to offer robust challenge to leaders. They have already picked up the need to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage; a nominated governor is in place and an action plan has been drawn together. They are quickly becoming the cornerstone to stronger leadership of the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority responded positively to the findings from my last visit and increased the range and amount of support available to the school. This is proving to be effective. A local authority officer visits your school frequently to keep an eye on progress but also to act as a sounding board for new ideas. An officer has worked intensively with the subject leader for mathematics and this is paying dividends as teaching is improving in this area. The newly appointed Early Years Foundation Stage manager is receiving good quality support and advice from local authority experts. Staff are embracing the suggested changes to improve children's learning during their time in Nursery and Reception. The local authority also forged links with a local school which has really made a difference to you and the deputy headteacher. This has helped to clarify roles and responsibilities and enhance your skills when checking on teaching to ensure senior leaders have a shared and accurate view of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**