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Ms Veronica Fenlon  
The Headteacher  
St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School  
Beaufort Road  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Ms Fenlon

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 27 January 2009, for 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 chair of governors, acting deputy headteacher and literacy coordinator for the time spent in discussions and to those who organised the scrutiny of work.

The substantive deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher are on long term leave of absence. The lack of experienced leaders, especially when there is a lot to do, has hampered the school's capacity to improve. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed to support the headteacher. Two additional local authority governors have recently been appointed to the governing body. A foundation governor vacancy is about to be filled.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in May 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the leadership of the school by allocating responsibilities more appropriately between senior and middle managers
- monitor and evaluate the work of the school more thoroughly in order to identify accurately the main areas for improvement and drive up standards
- draw up plans that respond to the school's changing circumstances, address the school's main priorities and eliminate the variation in practice that exists, especially in teaching and the curriculum for different groups
- improve achievement in writing and mathematics.



Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress overall. Satisfactory progress has been made with regard to addressing the weakness identified in the first bullet point above. Inadequate progress has been made in the other areas for development.

A revised leadership and management structure was established in January 2009. All responsibilities are allocated appropriately between senior and middle leaders. Clear job descriptions exist which detail leaders' duties and responsibilities.

Senior staff are monitoring teaching and learning and are aware of the main strengths and weaknesses in provision. However, the impact of activity to improve teaching and raise standards is too inconsistent. For example, better teaching and assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage is helping to raise standards. However, action to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching has not been fully effective. Unsatisfactory teaching has not been remedied quickly enough with the result that too many pupils are underachieving, particularly in Year 4. Too much teaching is inadequate and there is not enough good teaching to raise standards quickly. Overall, the strategies being adopted are not effective enough in moving satisfactory teaching to good or eliminating inadequate provision. The school lacks a spelling and handwriting framework to further improve pupils' writing skills. Data about pupils' performance is collected and appropriately analysed and teachers are now being held to account for pupils' progress. However, data and other assessment information are not being used well enough to plan lessons that are consistently challenging. The match of work to pupils' differing capabilities is not yet good enough. In general, the more and less able pupils are not being sufficiently stretched in lessons. Expectations as to what such pupils can achieve are not high enough.

The local authority inspected the school in October 2008. The whole-school action plan was judged to contain too few measurable success criteria by which leaders can judge the impact of its actions. The headteacher is in the process of drawing up a new school improvement plan that does focus on the main priorities, particularly raising standards and improving teaching. A draft plan was seen but, while measurable success criteria are more evident, it is not always made sufficiently explicit how the variation in teaching and the curriculum will be remedied. For example, clearly identifying where underachievement lies and the methods adopted to bring about improvement are not always specified. The proportion of good teaching aimed for in different years is often unrealistic. The literacy and numeracy action plans are weak and the identified success criteria are not well judged. The headteacher is rightly considering incorporating literacy and numeracy plans into the whole-school improvement plan.

In 2008, standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 were significantly below average. Year 2 writing standards fell to extremely low and there was a slight rise in pupils' reading performance. Standards in mathematics were similar to those achieved in 2007. In 2008, the number of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected level in English was similar to that achieved the year before. However, there was a sharp drop in the



percentage reaching the higher level. In mathematics there was a rise in the number of pupils reaching the expected level. Overall, too few pupils reach the higher levels in English and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6. The results mask considerable variation in pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, between September and December 2008, Year 2 pupils made good progress in writing but there was inadequate progress in the subject in Year 5. Over the same period Year 4 pupils made inadequate progress in mathematics but good progress in Year 2. There are also significant gender variations in pupils' progress. During the autumn term 2008, boys in Year 6 made inadequate progress in mathematics but girls' progress was satisfactory.

Inspectors are required to check that the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. All of the necessary employment and staff vetting procedures are carried out before staff and others start work. A single central record exists but some required information is missing. Whilst the date when essential checks were carried out is clearly specified, the person carrying them out is not noted.

The statement of action produced by the local authority following the last inspection met requirements. The level of support and guidance provided by the local authority has been satisfactory. This said, not all of the targeted support and intervention has been fully effective. It has improved provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and governors have welcomed the local authority training they have received to better hold the school to account. However, the support provided has not yet eliminated all of the unsatisfactory teaching and learning. The local authority inspection carried out in October 2008 came to fair and accurate judgements. The priorities for further improvement were the right ones to move the school forward. The monitoring and intervention group has met termly and has effectively evaluated the school's progress on each area for development.

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

David Rzeznik  
Her Majesty's Inspector

