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16 March 2011

Mr P Morgan
Headteacher
St James' Church of England Primary School Blackburn
Oozebooth Terrace
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 8EN

Dear Mr Morgan,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School Blackburn

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to parents, members of the governing body, staff and pupils for their helpful contributions during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 October 2009, 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since that inspection, the school's senior leadership team has been strengthened significantly. An acting deputy head teacher was seconded to the school by the local authority last year; her appointment became permanent in September 2010. Leadership was further strengthened at that point by the appointment of a second assistant headteacher. The leadership team has been driving forward improvements during the year, particularly in the curriculum and in the quality and impact of monitoring. The school has also benefitted from ongoing support from its local authority, particularly the input of specialist staff.

At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010, pupils' attainment was broadly average. Pupils' current overall attainment continues to be broadly average, although the school's tracking information and evidence seen in lessons show that the proportion of pupils who are working at higher than average levels has begun to rise. There are strong indicators that teaching is matched appropriately to pupils' learning needs and that more-able pupils, in particular, are responding increasingly well to improved challenge in lessons. Attainment in writing is improving rapidly across the key stages, because the school is now ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to work on extended writing projects and that they frequently practise and develop their writing skills in work across other subjects. This is

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having a positive impact on the quality of their writing, on their enjoyment of learning and on their progress and attainment across the curriculum. Similarly, improvements in the quality of teaching in mathematics have resulted in improving attainment and progress, with pupils showing interest and enthusiasm in mathematics lessons. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is being extended more successfully into the two small outdoor areas. This adds to the quality of children's learning and is the result of improved planning, which ensures that they have continuous access to relevant activities out of doors. Access to garden activities, such as digging, planting and investigating mini-beasts, is still limited by challenging premises issues and the school is currently exploring solutions to this problem.

Subject leaders now have a clear focus on improvement and play an active role in assuring the quality of provision across the school. There is a strong corporate ethos and the creation of cross-curricular teams has had an invigorating effect on curriculum design and delivery. Pupils say lessons are fun and that they enjoy solving problems. Subject leaders and the leadership team have a realistic understanding of what the next steps in their work need to be in order to ensure that provision is consistently good or better across the school so that attainment can continue to rise. For example, more effective teaching strategies are being introduced to help to ensure outstanding or good, rather than satisfactory, teaching. This is work in progress, but the majority of teaching seen during the inspection was of at least good quality, indicating that improvements are ongoing.

The school's capacity for continuing to improve is stronger than at the time of the previous inspection because the headteacher is now supported by effective middle leaders, staff at all levels and a knowledgeable, committed governing body who share the headteacher's vision for taking the school forward towards its ambitious improvement targets. Improved monitoring and assessment systems are becoming embedded and this is contributing to accurate self-evaluation.

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

Mrs Diane Auton
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009

- Improve attainment in writing and mathematics, especially for more-able pupils, by:
 - ensuring that work consistently challenges all groups of pupils and that lessons include more opportunities for writing
 - extending the role of subject managers so that good and outstanding classroom practice is shared.

- Develop the outdoor learning areas for the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children have varied opportunities, throughout the day, for active learning, purposeful play and exploration outdoors.