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Mr Nicholas Holt
Headteacher
Normand Croft Community School for Early Years and Primary Education
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Dear Mr Holt

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help, which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information, which you provided before and during my visit. Please convey my thanks to the pupils for being such good ambassadors, as well as to the staff, chair of governors and local contact adviser for talking to me about the school and its work.

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 on 18 -19 October 2006, the school was asked to improve further the following four areas of work: standards at Key Stage 1, particularly for boys and standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2; use assessment data effectively to ensure that work set for pupils is well matched to their abilities and to, improve monitoring and evaluation to ensure that teachers consistently implement policies and to ensure that support assistants are used well.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

The school understands the barriers around attainment and is sharply focused on narrowing the gaps between the national and local authority (LA) averages. Since the last inspection, attainment narrowed at the end of Year 2, particularly in writing and boys made significantly better progress than girls in the national tests. In Year 6, results improved in mathematics and targets were met. Nevertheless, standards remain significantly below national averages. Too few pupils achieved the higher levels and groups of pupils, notably White British and pupils of Turkish heritage, did not perform as well as their peers. Small groups of pupils of Caribbean and Bangladeshi descent under-performed in English and science.

Good systems have been introduced to analyse and tackle barriers leading to low standards. As a result, the sharp focus on using various literacy strategies from as early as the Foundation Stage, is leading to improvement in basic skills. Assessment for learning, a relatively new system, involves using assessment information in lessons to improve learning, is used extensively at the start of Early Years to track pupils' progress and take remedial action to address underachievement. Teachers have made a sound start to using assessment information to analyse test results, identify areas for improvement and use support strategies to accelerate progress for individuals and group of pupils. Assessment data is used well to track pupils' achievement, particularly vulnerable groups. The school has yet to begin monitoring by ethnicity; nevertheless, there is now reliable data, which teachers use well to improve learning. Sound procedures for moderating pupils' work are now in place, and although relatively new, teachers have a clearer understanding of marking work accurately and setting specific targets which pupils say 'help us to improve our work'.

Rigorous monitoring and formal termly assessment of pupils' progress has resulted in higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Increasingly, staff are held to account through robust line management and regular observation of teaching and learning. The tracking system confirms that more pupils are making better progress because of targeted support and use of more personalised learning. Timely initiatives to raise standards such as the Black Achievement Project will be fully implemented by the end of the academic year. Steps have been taken to examine the most effective teaching methods to motivate different groups of pupils. As a result, the school is in the process of using a wider range of approaches to support White British pupils.

Much has been done to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching remains satisfactory with some good features. Staffing is now more stable than in the past and appropriate steps have been taken to retain staff through providing substantial wider professional development. Staff are well supported to pursue courses that are linked to the school's priorities and as a result, the benefits of training and development are spread widely across the school.

Recent key appointments to the senior team at the start of the current academic year have made a significant difference to improving the school's capacity to drive improvement. The senior team is committed to improvement and have a shared understanding of what must be done to take the school forward. Staff therefore receive good quality support to improve teaching. A wide range of strategies, such as formal observations, team teaching, modelling and action planning is ensuring that good practice is shared. Planning now draws on the skills of teaching assistants. Observations of lessons confirm that they are better deployed, though there is still more work to do to ensure they are consistently supporting the teacher during whole class teaching. 'Lesson essentials', a set of guidance notes on the fundamentals of good teaching and learning, is used as a standard reference to ensure that planning reflects the needs of all pupils.

Governors are highly involved in school evaluation and have further plans to increase accountability and self-evaluation. The LA provides good support to ensure that future performance will be above the DCSF floor target.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

C P Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector