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Mrs S Cross
The Headteacher
St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cross

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to those teachers I observed and the staff and pupils who met with me.

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 27 and 28 June 2006, the school was asked to ensure that assessment information is used more effectively to plan challenging activities for all pupils and track their progress rigorously; promote the skills of speaking and listening more effectively; and, sharpen the use of performance data and other monitoring activities to raise standards further.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievements.

School self-evaluation judged that assessment information was being used well to improve pupil progress but this was not supported by the evidence gathered through analysing data, observing lessons, or looking at work in pupils' books. Whilst achievement at the end of Year 6 improved in 2007, standards were well below average and below those achieved at the time of the previous inspection. Standards at the end of Year 2 also dropped and were exceptionally low. This is because the work set for pupils often fails to meet their needs. Higher ability pupils spend too long on activities that consolidate rather than extend their learning. They receive work very similar to that provided for the middle ability pupils. In history and geography pupils of all abilities are set the same tasks. A particular concern is the

suitability of the work provided for pupils with learning difficulties. Typically, these pupils are given mundane tasks on worksheets that fail to promote new learning or are set work that is too hard for them. Their books show page after page of incomplete work with very little evidence that the pupils' efforts have been looked at by a teacher.

The school recognises that improving the pupils' speaking and listening skills is key to raising standards. However, although teachers have received training on how to promote speaking and listening and opportunities to develop these skills are now built into the Key Stage 1 timetable, there is little evidence of improved outcomes. There is no scheme of work to guide teachers about the specific skills to be developed as pupils progress through the school. In the lessons observed, developing speaking or listening was given minimal attention. There was no reference to speaking or listening objectives. Neither lesson plans nor classroom practice indicated that sufficient concern is given to the needs of pupils at an early stage of English acquisition. Key vocabulary and phrases were not routinely taught to the pupils. Paired talking was observed and one pupil was seen receiving support in his home language. However, even in these lessons, the quality of pupil talk was limited and characterised by short responses to closed questions. Leadership and management have not evaluated the quality of provision or outcomes in speaking and listening since the previous inspection.

The use of performance data and other monitoring activities has failed to secure higher standards. Lesson observations do not give clear judgements on the impact of provision on pupil progress and are, on occasions, too generous. This means that inadequate practice has not been improved through intensive support and rigorous challenge. Senior leaders monitor work in books in one year group once a term. This strategy has failed to identify and hold teachers to account for poor provision. In response to the exceptionally low standards at the end of Year 2, the senior leadership team made changes to staffing but did not conduct a detailed review of provision and outcomes in Key Stage 1. The consequence is that, despite additional support, standards remain exceptionally low.

The school was asked to track pupils' progress more rigorously. The systems in place throughout the last academic year failed to do this. A new tracking system implemented since September 2007 is more rigorous. The main development is that teachers meet with the headteacher every half term to review the progress individual pupils are making towards challenging targets. The new system does identify underachievement and is helping to establish a culture of accountability. However, robust moderation strategies need to be put in place to ensure that teacher assessments are secure.

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

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Her Majesty's Inspector