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17 July 2008

Mr Andrew Marshall  
The Headteacher  
St John the Baptist CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Marshall

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 July 2008, for the time senior staff gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which was provided before and during my visit. I am particularly grateful to the members of the leadership team, staff and pupils. Please could you also pass on my thanks to your chair of governors and the local authority school improvement advisor?

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 16 May 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve the provision for children in the Foundation Stage
- raise the quality of teaching so that learning is consistently good in all classes and enables pupils to make the best progress possible
- develop a shared responsibility amongst all levels of leadership and management, including governors, to work together to improve the school's performance.

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

The school's former deputy headteacher was appointed to the substantive position in April 2008. The senior leadership team, subject managers and governors have made a good response to the issues raised at the previous inspection. The school has also been effectively supported by the local authority on its journey of improvement. A clear action plan has been set out which has been communicated to, and well received by, all levels of management. Staff morale is high and there is a noticeable enthusiasm across the school 'to do well'. There is a corporate approach to the work of the school and the evaluation of school performance, particularly pupils' achievement, is rigorous.

The development of teaching and learning has been successful. The monitoring of lessons by senior staff is effective and provides them with a very accurate view of the quality of teaching enabling them to support and intervene with staff when necessary. Importantly, there is now a clear and effective cycle of accountability for pupils' progress. Their achievement is thoroughly monitored by class teachers and senior staff. This ensures that the school rapidly identifies pupils who are not making sufficient progress and provides them with effective additional support. Assessment information is also used by the majority of teachers to ensure that activities are well matched to individual needs, although this could be more refined in some classes. The pupils are enthusiastic learners who talk confidently about their work and listen maturely to the ideas of others. However, not all of them are clear about their individual learning targets and the school recognises that there is scope to improve the academic guidance pupils receive through teachers' marking.

Improvements in the consistency of teaching and the rigorous tracking of pupils' progress have ensured that more pupils are now making better progress than at the time of the previous inspection. School data shows that, in the vast majority of year groups, pupils are making good progress overall and achieving well. Despite this, the legacy of uneven progress identified at the last inspection means that not all pupils will necessarily reach their full potential in relation to their starting points, but the picture is rapidly improving. Standards are above average in Years 2 and 6. Pupils' writing is still a weakness in the lower years mainly because the recent improvements in Foundation Stage provision have not yet impacted on achievement further up the school.

Good progress has been made in improving the Foundation Stage. The outdoor area has been developed well and used successfully to encourage children's creative thinking and play, as well as their physical development. The most impressive improvements have been in the development of the children's communication, language and literacy skills where standards are now above average. The planning and delivery of this area of learning are much better, ensuring that knowledge and skills are developed progressively. Better attention is paid to children's individual needs and daily sessions of 'letters and sounds' mean that there is an improved pace of learning. Children are very motivated, working successfully by themselves or with their classmates. The good progress that children are now making reflects more successful teaching and provision.

Middle managers have grown in confidence and stature through the current academic year. They have contributed well to the school's improvement and become more involved in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of new developments and strategies. A new management structure has been set up for the next academic year which should continue the school's successful drive for distributive leadership. Governance of the school is good. Governors have successfully supported the move towards more devolved leadership with clear lines of responsibility for pupils' achievement and the quality of provision. They are supportive of the school and recognise the good improvement over the last academic year. Improvement of teamwork within leadership and management has been good.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Kessell  
Additional Inspector