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Mrs Nora Moffatt
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic VA Primary School
Lingfield Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS19 7PL

Dear Mrs Moffatt

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I also welcomed the opportunity to talk with other members of staff and to speak informally with pupils. Please pass on my thanks to all those involved.

As a result of the inspection in October 2007, the school was asked to:

- Improve the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage
- Use assessment systems consistently in lessons to ensure that activities challenge all groups of pupils and build on their previous learning
- Develop the role of subject leaders.

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.

Children arrive in the Nursery with skills and knowledge generally comparable to that of most children their age. Most children now enter Key Stage 1 working securely at the expected level for their age group. Monitoring visit evidence shows that standards are rising in the EYFS and pupils' progress is being accelerated in the EYFS and Key Stage 1, as a result of the school's effective strategies to increase achievement in these areas.

Most pupils reach above average standards by the end of Key Stage 1, although teacher assessments for 2008 indicate that standards dipped somewhat when compared to those achieved in previous years. This reflects the higher than usual proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in this cohort.

Standards reached by pupils when they leave the school in Year 6 are above average and their achievement is good.

Since the previous inspection, the acting headteacher has been appointed on a permanent basis and, following some staffing changes, the senior leadership team is now expanded with redefined roles and responsibilities. This has resulted in stronger management across the school.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has improved markedly. The school has taken effective action to address all of the areas of concern identified in the last inspection report which judged the Foundation Stage inadequate. The quality of provision in the EYFS has been significantly improved by the addition of carefully selected resources and alteration of the classroom layout. As a result, the EYFS unit provides a vibrant and exciting environment which is used effectively to inspire children in their learning. Children have easy access to the carefully supervised outside play area and they thoroughly enjoy the good range of stimulating learning opportunities it provides.

A Foundation Stage leader with specialist knowledge of Early Years education was appointed in September 2008. Long term staff absences have been resolved and a dedicated team of teachers and classroom assistants, who work well together, is in place. Extensive training and development for the EYFS team, together with well targeted support from the local authority, have ensured that previous weaknesses in teaching and learning have been successfully addressed. There are ample opportunities for children to carry out activities on their own and to work towards achieving the early learning goals at their own pace. All six areas of the EYFS curriculum are fully included in daily activities. Very effective planning and organisation, and thorough monitoring systems, have been implemented to ensure that all six areas of learning are covered consistently over time. Strategies to record individual children's progress are straightforward and being used well. Staff routinely note their observations and systematically report children's achievements and the steps the children take to develop their skills and knowledge in their individual EYFS profiles.

Assessment now takes place on entry to the Foundation Stage unit. This results in a more accurate picture of children's starting points and enables staff to tailor activities to meet children's individual learning needs and monitor their progress throughout the EYFS more effectively. The EYFS team work closely with staff in the main school to ensure that children have a smooth transition into Key Stage 1 and individual learning needs are supported appropriately.

A comprehensive system to track pupils' assessments is being used consistently throughout the school and is rigorously monitored by school leaders. This provides a reliable overview of progress made by different groups of pupils and a baseline from which to secure further improvement. Assessment information is used very effectively to identify where individual learning support is needed and so deploy classroom assistants appropriately. Consequently, learning support is tailored

carefully to meet the needs of individual pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who make good progress and achieve well as a result. Target setting and assessment information are increasingly being used to inform lesson planning. This ensures that new learning builds more effectively on previous knowledge and skills because teachers are better enabled to provide sufficiently challenging tasks for pupils. Pupils' progress in lessons is accelerating as a result. High standards of work are being maintained. Pupils are increasingly participating in assessing their own work, although the school recognises that there is more to do to embed this routinely and develop peer-assessment strategies. Marking is generally of a good standard and indicates clearly to pupils how they can improve further. Most pupils know their targets and what progress they are making. This boosts their self-confidence and enhances their enjoyment of learning because they gain a clearer sense of their own achievements.

Subject leaders have been well supported and are developing their roles with vigour using the local authority's materials to ensure uniform approaches are being adopted consistently throughout the school. Helpfully, the school timetable is organised so that subject leaders have blocks of time to undertake planning and development activities together. Subject leaders work extremely well together as a team to conduct lesson observations and undertake evaluations of pupils' books and marking. 'Curriculum walks' are undertaken regularly to test out the quality of provision and these often include school governors. Teachers routinely plan in year group teams and meet regularly in subject teams to share best practice. They also observe each other in the classroom and undertake 'class swaps' in order to ensure teaching and assessment strategies are applied consistently.

The headteacher monitors the school's actions frequently and rigorously. The new leadership team has gained a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the school. They have established a greater awareness among staff of the next steps required to raise standards further. The headteacher and all of the staff have pulled together and worked well as a team to overcome some significant challenges. All of the staff share a very clear vision for the school's development and improvement and morale is high. Professional development activities have been targeted effectively to secure improvement. Support from the local authority throughout the last year has been good and highly effective in helping the school implement the actions needed to tackle the areas for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Wendy Ripley".

Wendy Ripley
Her Majesty's Inspector