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Mr James Robert Telling
Headteacher
Katesgrove Primary School
Dorothy Street
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Dear Mr Telling

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 March 2009, 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 senior staff, subject coordinators, pupils, the group of governors and the School Improvement Partner, who met with me to talk about the school's work.

Following the last inspection, several changes have taken place in staffing. Two members of staff, including the science coordinator, left at the end of the summer term. Two senior leaders were appointed to this substantive post and given a remit to improve the science curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2. At the start of the current academic year, three newly qualified teachers joined the school and there was an increase in the pupil roll which has moved the school from a 1.5 form entry to two forms. This led to some restructuring, including moving staff to other areas of work and appointing two experienced teachers to the Nursery and Year 5/6. The number of pupils who join the school other than at the usual times of the year has increased slightly.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 June 2009, the school was asked to:

- Strengthen some teachers' skills in engaging all pupils more fully; checking pupils' grasp of new material through effective questioning and other means; and helping pupils to understand how to improve their work.
- Improve the curriculum for science by ensuring that topics are covered to greater depth and that learning in science develops progressively over each key stage.
- Ensure that middle leadership and management are of uniformly high quality in relation to the checking of pupils' progress: in particular, strengthen subject leadership in science and develop further the roles of subject leaders in non-core subjects.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time, the school is making good progress in addressing the issues.

Provisional results of national tests in 2008 at the end of Years 2 and 6 show a marked improvement, particularly in reading and writing. Although standards are still significantly below average overall, pupils made at least satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points, with an increasing number making better progress. Achievement varies from year to year and is still linked to the increasing number of pupils who join or leave the school at other than customary times of the year. Analysis of pupils' performance shows that they are meeting or exceeding their targets. In 2009, the targets set are more challenging than in previous years. The latest tracking and assessment data show that most pupils in Years 2 and 6 are meeting the targets in English and mathematics and particularly in science, where they are exceeding them. Leaders and managers recognise that there is still more to do to improve standards, particularly for the higher-attaining pupils who are not achieving their full potential.

Pupils are making better progress than at the time of the last inspection because senior leaders and managers have acted swiftly to introduce and sustain changes that will impact on the quality of provision over time.

A good range of strategies have been developed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Focused training and development have taken place, with a sharp focus on questioning techniques to improve pupils' understanding of their work. Developmental work on teaching approaches has led to changes in planning – this is now a team effort and, consequently, work is more closely matched to pupils' needs. In planning lessons, teachers give more attention to developing pupils' vocabulary, and their communication and presentation skills through discussion, questioning, using visual and practical activities, as well as information and communication technology (ICT) to engage pupils and to assess their learning. All of this work has increased pupils' independent learning and participation in speaking activities.

Since the last inspection, senior and middle managers have been given formal time to monitor their respective subject areas. As a result of increased observations and improved feedback to teachers, the quality of lessons is improving and the unevenness seen in lessons during the last inspection is less evident. This has led to more pupils making better progress. Pupils are quite clear that they learn best when they have clear learning objectives and teachers use the WALT ('What are we learning today?') and the 'My learning ...' approaches. Pupils say that this helps them to 'know what they are supposed to do'. They also pointed out that they learn best when teachers link subjects; use worked examples and practical activities; set targets; and mark their work with comments. However, they were also of the opinion that work could be more challenging.

Rapid progress has been made in developing the science curriculum. The coordinators have worked very closely with external consultants to rewrite the curriculum using nationally recognised schemes of work. Weaknesses in previous

schemes have been identified as a result of which there is now more focus on investigative work. More time has been allocated to the subject and it has a higher profile, which is similar to that of the other core subjects, English and mathematics. The heightened profile and emphasis on practical work have resulted in pupils indicating that science is now a favourite subject. Teachers are more confident when teaching science because of effective training, partnership work and sharing of resources with a local secondary school, and guidance from the external consultant. Much has been achieved within a short time but the coordinators recognise that, although the work is reviewed regularly, evaluation is not yet robust.

Much has been done to develop the leadership and management skills of the subject coordinators. Discussion with the middle leaders indicated that they have a sound understanding of the headteacher's vision to improve standards and how it is to be achieved. There is a universal understanding among all staff that a satisfactory school is not good enough. Leaders and managers form a cohesive team and this has contributed to their explaining and developing the message of high achievement. Progress is good because priorities have been identified for development. As a result, there are clear and focused procedures for monitoring and evaluating subjects across the curriculum. The school has begun the process of ensuring that managers are well equipped to carry out their duties. Several managers have either completed or are enrolled on leadership and management courses. Additionally, training is provided internally as the headteacher and other members of staff pass on their expertise to others. There are sound procedures for planning and identifying weaknesses and the senior team recognise that aspects of evaluation need to be developed further. The governors are very involved in the process of improvement; they hold the school to account through challenging staff, the senior team and middle managers during their regular reviews and observations.

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements. The local authority is providing extensive and effective support to help the school improve the areas of weakness and senior and middle managers value their interaction with the consultants and the School Improvement Partner. However, the school has not been given sufficient resources to meet the needs of the increasing number of pupils learning English as an additional language.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector