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Mrs Julie Lancaster-Smith
Headteacher
Swalwell Primary School
South View Terrace
Swalwell
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE16 3HZ

Dear Mrs Lancaster-Smith

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 October 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils and staff who gave up their time to meet with me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 7 and 8 October 2008, the school was asked to raise standards and achievement by:

- extending monitoring by middle leaders to improve the consistency and quality of teaching and learning
- using information about pupils' learning to set tasks that challenge at the correct level to improve progress
- ensuring that pupils understand their targets and use them to improve their learning.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The school has responded positively to the issues identified at its inspection in October 2008. There has been considerable staffing turbulence in recent years and as a result, the leadership team is relatively new. Nevertheless, the headteacher and

the leadership team are tackling the main issues facing the school with rigour and enthusiasm. The headteacher has a very clear understanding of how children learn and what they need to do to improve and this has been shared with all staff. Middle leaders have worked closely with the headteacher carrying out joint lesson observations, work scrutiny and analysis of data and planning. As a result, they have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. The headteacher and leaders are not complacent and prompt steps are taken to address any areas of weakness. Consequently, they have successfully worked to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Feedback from lesson observations is detailed and identifies precisely what teachers need to do to improve learning for pupils and also ensures that strategies are used consistently across the school. Middle leaders have received good support from the local authority and have been able to access high quality training including benefiting from opportunities to moderate samples of work and share good practice with other schools. There has been a good focus on ensuring that the individual needs of pupils are met. Pupils say their work is now much more challenging and lessons are fun. They say they now understand how to be good learners. One typical comment from a pupil was that staff are 'inspirational'.

The amount of good and better teaching has increased since the last inspection. As a result, the proportion of pupils making good progress in lessons has increased. Observations of lessons, scrutiny of planning and pupils' books confirm these improvements. Teachers carefully evaluate how well pupils have understood a particular concept and identify next steps in learning. This is closely monitored so that any pupils who are underachieving are promptly given the support they need, often by effective teaching assistants. Work is more closely matched to pupils' individual needs and there is a strong focus on ensuring all pupils are developing good basic skills. The school has been innovative in respect of the organisation of the curriculum and has extended the morning session to ensure pupils develop their skills in literacy and numeracy in a systematic way each day. Pupils are also able to practise these skills in other subjects in the curriculum. However, there has been a legacy of underachievement and this slows progress for some children as teachers and support staff have to spend valuable time reinforcing learning.

All pupils have individual targets and they know what they have to do to achieve them. These are accessible to pupils in every lesson and individual work is planned each day to ensure that pupils reach their targets. There is evidence in pupils' books to show where targets have been achieved but pupils are not always given the opportunity to identify for themselves when they have met their targets. Pupils say targets are much more challenging now and they find them helpful in indicating what they need to learn next.

Standards are rising and are closer to national expectations by the end of Year 6, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. However, the unvalidated results of the national tests in 2009 indicate a dip in writing. This is partly because nine pupils missed Level 4 by a few marks. A higher proportion of pupils achieved Level 5 in

reading, mathematics and science in 2009 than in the previous year. Standards at the end of Year 2 have risen to broadly average in reading and mathematics, but are still below average in writing. The majority of pupils are now making better progress given their starting points, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the school is aware that work still needs to be done to raise standards further, particularly in writing.

Since the inspection in 2008, the leadership team has been strengthened and good support and challenge has been provided by the local authority and the school improvement partner. Governors are more closely involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, providing effective challenge and support. The capacity for sustained improvement is strengthening well as seen in the success already evident in improved outcomes for pupils. This is because of the dedicated and determined leadership of the headteacher and the hard work and commitment of all staff.

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

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector