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Mrs Beverley Davies  
Headteacher  
St Mary's CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Davies

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 January 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, pupils in Years 4 and 6, and the school improvement partner who kindly gave up their time to tell me about the school.

Following the previous inspection there was a protracted period during which the school experienced a comparatively high number of changes of teaching staff.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that the more able pupils are challenged so that a greater proportion attain Level 5 in national assessments at the end of Year 6
- enable pupils to know how well they are doing in their work and what they need to do to improve
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2
- enable senior leaders and managers to use targets effectively to raise standards.

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

Since the previous inspection, the trend of above average standards by the end of Key Stage 1 has been sustained. However, standards at Key Stage 2 are more

variable. The results of the 2009 national tests were average in all three core subjects, a sharp fall on performance in 2008. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 was below average in English and mathematics, and well below average in science. Pupils' achievement has fallen gradually since 2007 from average overall, to much lower than average in 2009. A key factor in the dip in performance of this cohort was high levels of mobility, with a significant number of pupils joining the school late in Key Stage 2. The current picture of pupils' progress across the school is more positive. The school's own data show that almost all pupils are making at least satisfactory progress; some are doing better than this. This is a consequence of improved teaching and learning, interventions targeted at those who have ground to gain, activities that challenge the more able, and a curriculum that is more cohesive and engaging.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, there were a range of features that are contributing effectively to improvements in pupils' learning. These include good relationships between pupils and adults; sharply focused questioning that challenges pupils to explain their thinking and unearths misconceptions; a variety of activities that help maintain pupils' interest; and good modelling of learning and subject-specific vocabulary by teachers. The pace of learning slowed when pupils were not involved sufficiently in whole-class sessions. In the main, pupils are enthusiastic learners who show pride in their work. They regularly evaluate their own progress on tasks and engage in productive dialogue about their learning with their teachers, both orally and in their books. Pupils know their targets and say these help them understand what they need to do to improve their work and take the next steps in learning.

The school is developing a more consistent approach to meeting the needs of more able pupils. The majority of lesson planning identifies appropriate activities that extend the thinking of higher attainers and foster their independence as learners. However, sometimes activities planned increase the amount of work to be completed rather than the level of challenge. Beyond the classroom, there are a number of appropriate opportunities specifically aimed at more able pupils. A very recent initiative, working in partnership with a local grammar school, is the science club.

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a period of turbulence with regard to staffing. It has emerged from this in a stronger position and with some new senior leaders who, together with the headteacher, work effectively as a team. The headteacher has tackled inadequate teaching robustly. The school sets suitably challenging targets and checks progress towards these regularly. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's provision, as well as tracking pupils' progress, are increasingly thorough so leaders have a clearer view of the school's priorities. While these are addressed in development planning, the absence of quantifiable success criteria dulls the focus on what the school is aiming to achieve. Committed governors are making a purposeful contribution to the school's strategic direction. Links to classes and subjects are helping governors get to know the school

well. The broad range of pertinent skills they bring to their role, along with training, means they are well placed to challenge as well as support the school.

Since the previous inspection the local authority has given the school considerable, well targeted support in a range of areas including recruitment, quality assurance and governance.

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

Jane Austin  
Her Majesty's Inspector