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Mrs Margaret Borman
St John Southward RC Primary School
Lomeshaye Road
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 0DQ

Dear Mrs Borman

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I visited your school on 9 June 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you please pass on my thanks to the pupils, teachers and the chair of governors?

Since the previous inspection there have been changes to staff including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher, with specific responsibility for Key Stage 2, and the appointment of a newly qualified teacher. It is planned that the teacher responsible for the Year 4 class, currently being taught by a temporary teacher, will return in September 2010. The school roll has remained stable although there has been an increase in the proportion of children entering the school who originate from Eastern Europe.

As a result of the inspection on 17 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve achievement and standards in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics and science
- improve teaching and learning in Key Stage 2, especially in checking pupils' progress and planning work that tackles identified weaknesses
- strengthen leadership in Key Stage 2 with a focus on closer monitoring of teaching and learning and evaluating pupils' performance.

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.

Overall pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection. In Key Stage 2 achievement in English has improved significantly with most pupils reaching or exceeding their targets in 2009. In mathematics there was also improved progress; however, in science this improvement was not as significant. In 2010 the school predicts that standards in national tests will fall slightly and this pattern may be repeated in 2011. This prediction is based upon the high proportion of pupils in each class who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or are at an early stage of learning English.

The proportion of children who are persistently absent is above average and reducing this remains a priority for the school. After attendance levels dipped in 2008, the school took action that helped raise attendance in 2009 to around the levels found at the previous inspection. This strategy remains in place.

The single central record of safeguarding checks made on staff complies with current recommendations.

The school's self-evaluation provides it with a broadly accurate appraisal of its current strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders and managers are effectively tackling the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and are steadily making improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the proportion of good or better teaching has improved in English in Key Stage 2 as a result of better planning and matching work more closely to pupils' abilities. Pupils often spend their time working in pairs or small groups on interesting and challenging tasks. In a small number of cases learning objectives do not stretch the more able: the school is aware of this and staff development activities continue to focus on this area, particularly in science.

The local authority has provided effective support to the school and recognises that significant improvement has been made. Leaders are now using the local authority tracking system more effectively to assess pupils' progress more frequently and precisely.

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

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector