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Mr James Bird
Headteacher
Newton Bluecoat Church of England Primary School
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Lancashire
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Dear Mr Bird

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 09 June 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority officer and the pupils from Years 3 to 6 who gave up their time to talk to me about the school.

Since the last inspection there have been some changes to staffing. The senior leadership team has been strengthened with the temporary appointment of an associate deputy headteacher and the internal promotion of a teacher to a senior role. Two members of staff remain absent due to illness.

As a result of the inspection on 04–05 November 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement
- strengthen arrangements for monitoring the progress of pupils and ensure that teaching and planning across the curriculum are challenged rigorously when they fail to have the expected impact.

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 pupils' achievement.

Across the school pupils' achievement is improving as the quality of teaching improves. Key Stage 1 assessments in 2010 indicate that overall attainment is similar to attainment last year while the number of pupils reaching the higher Level 2 grades has increased in reading and mathematics. Teachers' assessments for the

current Year 6 pupils indicate that the proportion of pupils expected to gain the higher Level 5 in English has increased significantly. This indicates that the school is set to exceed its original target by 10% in this subject. Staff and governors are committed to raising achievement for all pupils and there is a rigorous focus on accelerating progress across the school. Morale is improving as teachers develop strong teamworking practices and increase their skills and confidence in accurately assessing pupils' work.

Eight lessons were sampled during the monitoring inspection and this process confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning is improving. All staff have been involved in developing the school's new teaching and learning policy. Training has been planned on the basis of staff's needs, collectively and individually, and staff have received an extensive range of professional development. Support from the local authority has enabled the school to develop effective assessment for learning in the classroom. Teachers explain the purpose of the activities and the direction of learning. Questioning techniques and 'talking partners' are used effectively to extend pupils' thinking. 'Working walls' have been developed in each class and are appreciated as valuable prompts by pupils. For example, one pupil in a Year 3 literacy lesson commented that the prompts displayed on the wall helped his thinking. Local authority consultants have provided training in assessing pupils' performance and, as a result, teachers have increased confidence in making and moderating judgements of pupils' work accurately. This leads to planned activities which are more suited to the needs of all groups of pupils with time used effectively for learning. Pupils comment on the more exciting, practical activities they now receive, although a few say they still want more challenging work.

Pupils now understand what they are learning and how they can improve their work. Whole-school, class and group targets are displayed in classes to focus on the planned improvement. Pupils know their curriculum targets in reading, writing and mathematics and these are displayed in classrooms and recorded in pupils' books. Pupils use 'learning ladders' to check their own and their classmates' work and are given time to read and respond to teachers' comments. The marking policy has been reviewed and a system that acknowledges pupils' successes and identifies their next steps in learning has been adopted, although not fully refined and embedded.

Senior leaders and local authority advisers are robustly monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning through a range of activities. These include dual lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and of teachers' planning, rigorous interrogation of assessment information, half-termly meetings about pupils' progress and discussions with pupils. As a result, senior leaders are more able to track pupils' progress throughout the school and identify underachievement; teachers appreciate the useful feedback and the identification of how improvements can be made. Weaknesses in teaching have been tackled. Subject leaders have received training from local authority consultants and in turn have disseminated this to all staff. For example, literacy and numeracy leaders have received training on monitoring standards which they have shared with class teachers. This system has improved the accuracy of assessment and raised teachers' expectations of what pupils, including

those who are more able, can achieve. The school has a clearer picture of where underachievement lies and uses this information to inform the organisation of teaching groups, the deployment of additional adults and the use of support programmes. Governors are rigorously holding senior leaders to account for the performance of the school.

The local authority's statement of action met requirements. A very good supportive coaching model, well-planned training and expert guidance are being provided by local authority consultants and advisers to support the leadership team in bringing about the necessary improvements.

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

Eileen M Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector