



17 January 2007

Mrs E Smith
St Matthew's CE Primary School
Withers Street
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 1ED

Dear Mrs Smith

OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WITH NOTICE TO IMPROVE

Thank you for the help which you and your staff and governors gave when I inspected your school on 16 January 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection in June 2006, the school was asked to:

- implement plans to establish an effective and permanent senior management team, with a particular view to strengthening leadership in Key Stage 2;
- improve the teaching in Key Stage 2 so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable, especially in mathematics;
- work with parents to improve attendance.

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

Good progress has been made in implementing plans to establish an effective and permanent senior leadership team. Leadership in Key Stage 2 has been strengthened considerably. The local authority supported the governing body, in acting quickly to strengthen the senior leadership of the school. An experienced acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2006. The appointment of both to permanent positions from January 2007 has helped to ensure continuity of improvement since September 2006.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very well together. They provide clear educational direction and inspire confidence among staff, parents, pupils and governors. Their leadership is bringing about improvement. Staff morale is good and they are working hard as a team towards common aims, to raise standards and to take care of and support all pupils. The school's high expectations of behaviour, attendance and learning are communicated clearly to parents, pupils and staff and a positive ethos is well established. The recently introduced behaviour policy has had a very positive influence on pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards school.

Leadership of Key Stage 2 is currently the responsibility of the deputy headteacher. Senior leaders and local authority consultants have worked well with key subject leaders to develop their leadership skills. Leaders of numeracy and literacy are held accountable for the progress of pupils and the standards they reach. Subject leaders have contributed well to developing systems for the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. They have used this information well to identify areas for improvement within each subject, and pupils who are underachieving and in need of additional support. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning carried out by senior leaders and the local authority is helping to raise standards of teaching. Weaker teaching has been recognised and appropriate action is being taken to bring about improvement.

The school is aware of the need to strengthen senior leadership further by clarifying roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team.

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2, especially in mathematics. Pupils are settled, well behaved, eager to learn and they do well. Relationships are good between teachers and pupils. Lessons are conducted with good humour and much learning is considered by pupils to be fun. The recently introduced tracking of pupils' progress helps teachers to set high expectations and to match lesson activities to pupils' needs well. Pupils have clear learning targets for numeracy, reading and writing that have arisen from teachers' close analysis of pupils' prior learning. Pupils find these helpful in knowing what they need to concentrate on to do well. The school recognises the need to develop a more consistent approach to marking pupils' work so that pupils fully understand how successful they have been and what they need to do to improve.

Recent training has helped staff to understand the needs of pupils whose home language is not English. The writing programmes introduced in Key Stage 1 are helping to raise standards from an early age. There is a good

focus on developing pupils' understanding of key technical language in some lessons, but this is not yet consistent across all classes.

Pupils' progress across Key Stage 2 remains inconsistent because staffing difficulties have not yet been fully resolved. Teaching is not yet consistently good and the progress of some pupils is not yet good enough. Many pupils are making steady progress in mathematics and English, but they have not yet overcome a legacy of slower progress in previous years and have much ground to catch up before reaching the standards expected of them.

Good improvement has been made in working with parents to improve attendance. The attendance rate for the autumn term 2006 increased by almost four percentage points when compared with the same period in 2005. The school's expectations of attendance and punctuality are communicated clearly to parents through regular weekly newsletters. The school is awaiting guidance from the local authority before drawing up a policy on the taking of extended holidays during term time.

The local authority has provided a good level of support to the school and has helped to bring about improvements. The local authority's action plan and the Intensifying Support Programme have underpinned the well focused and effective support provided by local authority consultants and officers. The local authority was quick to ensure strengthened leadership. It has provided high quality support and training, leading to improvements in the teaching of numeracy and literacy, the development of assessment systems, and support for pupils whose home language is not English.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith
Additional Inspector