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Mr Hampton
Headteacher
Ulcombe Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Hampton

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 25 January 2011, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I much appreciated the cheerful openness with which everyone responded to my questions.

Since the previous inspection the number of pupils in the school has fallen. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes: Reception and Year 1; Years 2 to 4, with a few of the most able Year 4 pupils joining Years 5 and 6 for English and mathematics; and Years 5 and 6.

As a result of the inspection on 25 March 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.

Pupils' written work displays growing confidence, imagination and accuracy, with examples of high level creative writing in Key Stage 2. Last summer's national tests for Year 6 showed that progress overall and in English was significantly better than that nationally. Attainment was average, with English results showing a marked improvement on 2009. Although the percentage of children meeting national expectations in mathematics was slightly higher in 2010 than 2009, the average points scored declined slightly. Overall, attainment in Key Stage 1 was slightly below average but improving. Pupils' progress and attainment in Years 1 and 2 were



stronger in number-based work than in reading and writing, continuing the pattern seen at the end of Reception.

Pupils are keen to meet expectations but are not always clear about what they should be aiming for. Expectations become more challenging in Key Stage 2 but pupils are not always prompted to reflect on their work and identify how to improve when tackling a similar activity. Opportunities are limited for the most able to take responsibility for their learning and to lead others. On occasion, less able and less confident pupils are too quickly given solutions by adults rather than being prompted to explore alternative strategies. There is, however, much good practice. Pupils work well collaboratively, particularly enjoying practical work and drama. A Year 6 girl spoke for many: 'If you're doing something really exciting, you learn.'

Professional development and monitoring of teaching and learning have brought improvements. Based on accurate assessment of pupils' progress, planning accommodates the considerable range of age and level in each class. Teachers and support staff have effective questioning skills and use appropriate technology confidently. Small classes allow for well targeted feedback in lessons. Occasionally, teachers' and teaching assistants' wish to be encouraging deters them from challenging an incomplete or inaccurate answer but generally there is a cheerfully constructive rapport between adults and pupils. Much marking of written work is thorough and helpful but less able pupils are not always given specific guidance on how to improve. The curriculum encourages links between subjects and ensures that topics are not repeated over the two or three years spent in a mixed-age class. Tasks are well matched to individuals' age and abilities and progression is evident.

The headteacher and governing body have set realistic targets. The school improvement plan is sensibly structured and detailed. Roles and responsibilities are clear, including monitoring and evaluation of strategies to improve teaching and learning. Each teacher has responsibility for a number of subjects and their capacity as leaders is strengthening, underpinned by training and greater accountability.

While the school has satisfactory capacity to improve based on effective action taken so far, there are two inhibiting factors: a decline in pupil numbers, and a small but significant group of persistent absentees. The school's strategies include rewards for good attendance, a swift response when any pupil fails to attend and referral to the Education Welfare Officer if attendance remains poor. These are having a positive impact but there remains a core of non-attenders.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009:

- Raise standards and acceleration of pupils' progress, ensuring that leaders and teachers use assessment data more accurately, and involving pupils more in setting their own learning targets.

- Improve the effectiveness of teaching, ensuring that lessons fully meet the needs of pupils of all abilities in each class and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- Work with the small number of parents and pupils to improve overall rates of attendance and levels of punctuality.