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Mrs Ryan
Headteacher
St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School
4 New Street
Chatham
Kent
ME4 6RH

Dear Mrs Ryan

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 February 2011, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I would be grateful if you could also thank members of staff and the pupils.

There have been significant changes to the school context since the last inspection. The school was scheduled to be closed last year by the local authority but a campaign was started by the local community to save it. The ensuing adjudication resulted in a late decision for the school to remain open. At this point all three long-standing teachers and the headteacher retired. A new headteacher took up post in January 2011 along with three new teachers.

As a result of the inspection on 16–17 September 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Overall, pupils' attainment is broadly average. In reading, improvements since the time of the last inspection are unlikely to be sustained in light of the school's own tracking data which show a predicted dip for 2011. Likewise in writing the dip is more pronounced and the school's tracking data currently show that pupils are likely to attain below this year's national average. Considering the starting points of these pupils, who left the Early Years Foundation Stage with above average attainment, progress is inadequate. In mathematics, tracking data show that pupils are attaining



better than in the previous year. This is because of a focus on improving the challenge for the more-able pupils in particular. A much higher percentage of pupils are predicted to gain the highest level of attainment. However, despite this improvement, the progress of too many pupils has been inadequate or barely satisfactory. Historically, children have made a good start to their education in the Reception class but then progress has slowed markedly in Key Stage 1 resulting in pupils not reaching the levels of attainment of which they are capable.

The new headteacher and her team are working hard to implement plans to combat previous underachievement but their work is only just beginning and it is too early to gauge any impact of the actions they have taken. All three teachers are new to the school and are only just beginning to know the pupils in their classes. Lesson observations showed the quality of teaching to be satisfactory overall but good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Reception class children were challenged well through good questioning which made them think more about their work. Teaching assistants assess how well children are making progress and prompt them to take the next step in their learning. However, in other lessons behaviour is not always managed effectively and impedes learning. Sometimes teachers talk for too long and keep pupils sitting on the floor for extended periods; this slows their progress. Teachers do not always focus on what they want pupils to learn; too often the lesson consists of a number of tasks or activities. As a result pupils do not know what they are going to learn by the end of the lesson but they are able to talk about the task they are doing. Clear learning objectives are not always shared with the pupils but new target sheets in some subjects are enabling pupils to gauge where they are in their learning. In a literacy lesson, two boys were observed discussing their target and what they needed to do to achieve it but this is not commonplace.

The quality of learning has begun to improve through the introduction this term of a more creative curriculum which has motivated pupils and engaged them more effectively in their learning. Pupils are more enthusiastic about writing for example, and there are signs in exercise books and in displays of better quality work. This approach has ensured that pupils are given more time to talk about their learning and to use their initiative to work independently. A series of trips and visitors to the school has enriched the curriculum well.

Existing assessment information is in the process of being reviewed and a new system is planned for introduction in the near future. Staff training is in place to ensure that all teachers understand how to use it effectively. The school has identified trends from the current tracking data and are aware of areas for improvement and specific areas of weakness. Historically, too little has been done too late to identify those pupils in danger of underachieving. Consequently they have continued to fall behind and not make the progress they should. Strategies to help pupils catch up are weak and have not been thought through well enough. The headteacher is in the process of reviewing the support for these pupils in order to promote better progress.



Since taking over the school, the headteacher has rewritten the school development plan taking into account the strengths and areas of weakness evident. School self-evaluation and improvement planning are being given greater priority. The governing body is being restructured so that governors are able to hold the school to account more effectively for the standards it achieves. An improved monitoring system is in place with clear expectations. These systems are very new and have yet to show any impact on raising attainment and accelerating progress.

The headteacher and her team are beginning to work together to drive improvement. The new monitoring and management systems are being implemented and are focused on raising the quality of education for the pupils. The school appreciates the valuable support the local authority provides and the support and challenge of the School Improvement Partner. The local authority is monitoring the school's work through its termly reviews.

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

Glynis Bradley-Peat
Additional Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2009.

- Raise attainment and the rate of progress in writing and mathematics by improving the use of assessment in lessons so that all pupils are appropriately challenged.
- Improve the quality of learning by clarifying and focusing on what pupils will be learning rather than doing, giving pupils more opportunities to talk about their learning and to use their own initiative.
- Make better use of the existing assessment information to identify trends and areas for improvement and implement strategies to tackle specific areas of weakness.
- Strengthen the links between school self-evaluation and improvement planning so that planned improvements are more closely linked to identified weaknesses, and outcomes are more easily monitored and measured.

