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Mrs Louise Aird
The Headteacher
Cold Harbour Church of England School
Highland Close
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Milton Keynes
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Dear Mrs Aird

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Cold Harbour Church of England School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, governors, pupils, parents and carers who met with me during my visit.

Since the last inspection, turnover of teaching staff has been very high. The school leadership team has been restructured. Alongside the headteacher, the school now has one rather than two assistant headteachers. Leadership functions have been distributed more widely across an extended leadership team of four phase leaders and the leaders of literacy and numeracy.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 October 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.

Children continue to make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage. Attainment of pupils in assessments the end of Key Stage 1 rose markedly in reading, writing and mathematics in 2010, especially at the higher levels, and moved a little above the national average in all areas for the first time in four years. However, pupils' attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010 recovered only slightly from a sharp drop in 2009. While overall attainment is



broadly average by the end of Key Stage 2, too many pupils across the whole ability range have not made the progress expected of them in English or mathematics in national tests over the last three years. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with English as an additional language have generally made satisfactory progress.

The school's own monitoring records of current classes show that progress remains below expectation in English (especially writing) and mathematics across Key Stage 2. Following the last inspection, the school has given particular attention to improving pupils' writing, and positive results are now becoming evident throughout the school. Teachers are using comprehensive assessments of pupils' writing capabilities to plan work which challenges those of all abilities, and to offer pupils clear and specific support and guidance on how to improve the quality of their written work. Pupils themselves are beginning to evaluate each other's work using clear success criteria. Lively displays around the school celebrate pupils' writing, and 'Knowledge Nest' homework projects involve parents and carers in supporting their children's written presentations on meaningful research topics. Learning in literacy lessons is often enjoyable and purposeful. In Key Stage 2 mathematics, however, expectations for pupils' progress are sometimes low and the pace of learning slow. Pupils are not given sufficiently clear and specific guidance on which aspects of their mathematics skills they most need to improve. Learning and progress remain weak in this key subject.

Phase leaders have led teams of teachers in planning topics and themes which allow pupils to develop and apply their knowledge and skills across a range of subjects in engaging contexts. The planning of units of the cross-curricular programme is clear and identifies how pupils can develop skills in different subjects. However, pupils' learning through these topics is variable. The 'Titanic' theme has stimulated a good deal of interest and excitement for pupils in Years 5 and 6, as they develop, for example, a range of reading and writing skills to explore aspects of the Titanic story and the history of its passengers, crew and artefacts. Pupils from different phases have collaborated successfully on topics to help pupils in their transition from one phase to another. In Year 3/4 classes, however, topic work has lacked continuity and depth of learning to provide sufficient challenge to all pupils. Throughout the cross-curricular programme, there have not been enough planned opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their number skills.

In the year following the last inspection, the headteacher's efforts to establish greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning were constrained by considerable staffing turbulence, including at senior level. Staffing is now much more settled. The headteacher has built and distributed leadership across a cohesive and energetic senior team of phase and core subject leaders, who share a clear vision for improving pupils' achievement. Senior leaders, many new in post, play an active role in monitoring pupils' progress. They now have a good flow of assessment information to enable them to identify pupils who are underachieving and to intervene with additional support where appropriate. This is a considerable



improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher, increasingly well supported by the senior team, rigorously monitors the quality of teaching and learning. Through the sharp identification of the school's key priorities resulting from this monitoring, the school has formulated a coherent action plan for the current academic year. The actions are well focused with clear and measurable success criteria, and progress against the plan is regularly evaluated. The actions set in place have yet to overcome all of the weaknesses in pupils' learning and progress, so the school's progress in making improvement to date is inadequate. However, the actions it is taking are yielding clear improvements, for example in pupils' literacy development and rising attainment at Key Stage 1. The school is therefore making satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity to improve.

The school is receiving regular, effective consultancy support from the local authority to help improve its quality of provision for literacy and to develop leadership capacity. The school has greatly valued this support, which has contributed to improvements in both aspects.

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

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

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

- Develop the skills of middle managers to enable them to more effectively address inconsistencies in teaching and learning by them undertaking:
 - more frequent reviews of progress (informed by improved access to data)
 - more sharply focused observation of teaching and learning.
- Address weaknesses in writing by improving the consistency and quality of written assessment throughout both key stages.
- Provide pupils with more opportunities to reinforce their learning by further development of cross-curricular links.

