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Mrs K Baker
The Headteacher
St Helen's Church of England Primary School
Abbotsham
Bideford
Devon
EX39 5AP

Dear Mrs Baker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 May 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 governor, teachers and pupils who spoke to me.

Since the time the school was previously inspected, there have been a number of staffing changes. The staffing situation is now more stable. The school has been on a local authority intervention and support programme and has also received extensive support from local authority literacy and numeracy advisers. The support programme should end in the near future but the school has opted to continue with the literacy and numeracy support so that teachers might continue the development work in those areas.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 March 2010, 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment in 2010 at the end of Year 6 was significantly higher than it had been in previous years. Attainment at the end of Year 2 continued the trend of being significantly above average. The progress made from their starting points by the Year 6 pupils was also better than that in previous years. There was no significant difference between the achievement of any groups. The school's own much-



improved data tracking indicates that this progress has been maintained for pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 who are on track to meet their challenging targets. Pupils enjoy school; they behave well and participate well in lessons. They work together well in pairs and groups and there is a high level of peer support so that pupils feel confident to proffer answers even if they are not sure if they are right. Pupils are very clear about what they need to do to improve their work and give very specific examples, particularly about their writing, of what they should do to take their work to the next level. They feel that they are being challenged and that the work is rarely too easy for them. A number of pupils did say, however, that they would like to be updated more regularly about the levels at which they are working.

The proportion of good lessons is steadily increasing. Plans are detailed and teachers identify well how they are to meet the needs of individual pupils. Group work is planned well and support from teachers and teaching assistants is well targeted and thorough. Teachers give pupils opportunities to be independent and are making good use of self-assessment to involve pupils more in their learning. Some particularly good use of probing questioning and thinking time were seen, but not all teachers are consistently using that approach yet. Pupils are getting good opportunities to write in a range of genres and to draft and revise their written work. In numeracy lessons, they are given challenge in the form of problems related to daily life. The emphasis has appropriately been on improving the quality of teaching in literacy and numeracy. The school is, however, aware of the need to extend that improvement to the foundation subjects where the basic skills can be applied.

The school has effective systems for monitoring the progress pupils make. The literacy and numeracy subject leaders make good use of regular summative assessment and analysis of data to plan for intervention to ensure a consistent rate of progress. At class level, although it is at early stages, teachers are already making good use of online tracking systems to identify those pupils who are progressing more slowly and to target them in their own classrooms. Teachers ensure that pupils have personal targets and they are revisited when work is marked. Marking in literacy is good throughout the school as it gives feedback on why work is good and exactly how it might be improved. In numeracy, although there is some good diagnostic marking, it is not sufficiently consistently subject specific to be able to help move pupils forward as quickly. Marking in other subjects is variable and has not been an area of priority, although the school is planning for it to be in the near future.

The school has focused very well on improving the quality of teaching and learning. There has been a high level of lesson observations across the school and these have been well coordinated. Joint observations have ensured that judgements are moderated and good use has been made of the subject expertise of local authority consultants. Written feedback on lesson observations has been detailed and strengths and areas for development well identified. Teachers have engaged with this professional development well and talk openly and reflectively about their practice. There have been good opportunities to share practice. A good example of



this are the regular shared lesson planning sessions which were started after the headteacher's monitoring identified the need.

The governing body has developed a sharper focus on the quality of teaching and learning and on the analysis, and use, of data. The headteacher has an accurate picture of strengths and areas for development for the school and has provided support and challenge to the teachers as they improve their practice. The school has made good use of the raising attainment plan to ensure that the right priorities are identified and specific targets are set. This has not been exemplified in the same way in the school development plan which is too general and lacks measurable targets. The headteacher and the governing body are aware of this and have plans to sharpen the school's improvement planning once the local authority support programme has ended.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Improve standards and progress by raising teachers' expectations, particularly in setting work which is appropriately challenging for more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of learning by making better use of assessment data and pupils' targets in teaching so that they have a clearer idea of how they can improve their work.
- Make monitoring of teaching and learning more consistent and rigorous in order to improve teaching so that it all matches the best practice in the school.

