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Mrs Lorna Priddle
The Executive Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Junior School
Douglas Road
Maidstone
Kent
ME16 8ER

Dear Mrs Priddle

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 July 2011, for the time you gave to the preparatory meeting and for information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the two heads of school, to staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority district manager and pupils.

Since the last inspection the school has appointed an executive headteacher and two new heads of school, one of whom was the former deputy headteacher and one who is new to the school. Following a period of long-term illness, one member of staff left the school. From September 2011 a newly qualified teacher will join the school to teach Year 3 and a new teacher has also been appointed to teach Year 6. The junior school is undergoing federation with St Michael's Infant School.

As a result of the inspection on 30 November 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 is making good progress in addressing the areas for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Leaders have taken very firm action to address inadequate behaviour. The executive headteacher quickly put in place a new behaviour policy, successfully raising expectations and helping pupils understand rewards and sanctions. The new policy, with a sliding scale from poor to outstanding behaviour on a coloured chart, has significantly raised pupils' aspirations. During the inspection teachers used the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils explain how much behaviour has improved and

in lessons most behaviour is now good, reflecting a renewed respect for learning. Most pupils are courteous and polite to each other, to staff and to visitors. Leaders keep parents and carers well informed of changes at the school.

The entire ethos of the school has changed according to staff and pupils. Many pupils confirm that the school is 'now a warm environment to learn'. The improved environment has encouraged pupils' respectful conduct. Pupils take pride in their work and want to do well in their new classrooms. Investment in laptops and electronic whiteboards has improved pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Teachers confidently use ICT and, as result, pupils use a greater variety of resources in their learning than previously. Pupils play well together and say there is much less bullying, aided by new play equipment, a quiet area and improved garden area for pupils to sit and chat.

Leaders have used a tightly focused staff development programme to help teachers revisit their practice and scrutinize what makes a good lesson. The fervent drive to move teaching from inadequate to at least satisfactory has been successful. In good teaching the pace of learning is brisk. Teachers use open-ended questioning to develop pupils' speaking and listening, check pupils' learning and give pupils' opportunity to explain their ideas. Targeted questioning is highly inclusive, ensuring everyone makes a contribution. Teaching is pitched at the right level and, through a combination of whole-class and group work with good visual aids to stimulate discussion, pupils make good progress. Teachers set high expectations and most pupils know their targets. Some marking helps pupils understand their targets and what they need to do to improve, but this is not consistent nor of a high enough quality throughout the school.

In satisfactory lessons there are missed opportunities to help pupils develop better writing skills through extended prose. In these lessons teachers' planning does not always use assessment data to plan learning matched to levels of ability. Therefore, some work is not demanding enough. The quality of writing remains a concern in some pupils work in Year 4 and Year 5.

Leaders have overhauled the assessment system, reviewing some previously inaccurate assessment data. As a result, the new system to track pupils' progress is robust and accurate, providing up-to-date assessment information about attainment and progress. Using data to plan successful lessons is improving and in good lessons most learning is well matched to different levels of ability.

The school's internal data show that pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate, although the current progress of pupils in Year 4 has been hampered by several changes of teacher. Leaders are quickly dealing with a few remaining pockets of inadequate achievement, especially in Year 3 and Year 4. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities remains variable. Unvalidated school data show that Year 6 results for 2011 are likely to be below average compared to the national picture as they were last year. By contrast, the focus on challenging most-able pupils in lessons has led to a rise in the percentage of pupils

attaining Level 5 in mathematics and English. Leaders have set challenging targets for 2012. Whilst these targets are highly aspirational, the trajectory of improvement seen in good teaching and some good progress in recent months signify a key shift in raising achievement.

The local authority supports the school well. The statement of action includes ambitious targets and clearly defined timescales for improvement. Leaders make good use of external advisers and personnel from the local authority to help improve the quality of teaching. The governing body is receptive to debate with leaders and the local authority to better hold all staff to account for raising achievement. The action plan devised by leaders draws successfully upon the statement of action and has clear success criteria which are continually reviewed. The two heads of school work extremely well with the executive headteacher to lead effectual change.

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

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve behaviour across the school by:
 - ensuring that staff, pupils and their parents and carers are all working to an agreed standard for behaviour
 - applying and monitoring the implementation of agreed procedures for behaviour management consistently in all lessons and out-of-class situations.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that by July 2011, the large majority of lessons are good or better, by:
 - ensuring consistent challenge for the most-able pupils in lessons
 - making sure that a brisk pace is maintained throughout lessons, to engage all pupils
 - identifying best practice and providing training for staff so that it is used in teaching all year group and classes.
- Raise attainment, and particularly the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in their key skills, by:
 - ensuring that activities and resources are more closely related to the pupils' interests
 - developing cross-curricular links so that pupils have frequent opportunities to reinforce their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects.