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Ms Frances Nash
Headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School
Fairfield Road
New Romney
TN28 8BP

Dear Ms Nash

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 July 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

Significant changes in the school's leadership and staffing have been made since the last inspection, with more planned for September. Two new phase leaders were appointed in April, two other members of staff have left and seven new teachers have been appointed to start in September.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 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 satisfactory progress since the last inspection in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

Based on pupils' current work and national test outcomes, achievement is improving. Attainment at the end of Year 2 is rising in reading and writing but fell slightly this year in mathematics. However, results in national tests improved this year for Year 6 pupils, particularly in mathematics, where pupils' attainment has risen from 57% reaching the expected levels to 74%. The increased focus to remedy weaknesses and tackle past underachievement is starting to take effect. Progress is stronger through Years 3 to 6, but there are variations, as teaching is not yet consistently

good. More able pupils are being challenged more appropriately but this is still not the norm. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate in-class support, supplemented by one-to-one support for their specific needs through small group work.

Behaviour is improving; pupils behave satisfactorily around the school and in classes but are sometimes boisterous and can lack the self-discipline to control their behaviour when working independently or waiting for the teacher's help. Teachers record behaviour within lessons more thoroughly so senior leaders can spot any patterns or dips in behaviour. Not enough pupils are involved in taking the lead in influencing others' behaviour by being 'peacemakers' or 'mediators'. Many say they enjoy school but recognise that behaviour dips occasionally.

The quality of teaching and learning is improving but changes in staffing mean that these improvements are not yet secure. In lessons, explanations from the teacher are now generally shorter so pupils get down to activities more quickly and the pace of learning is quicker in most, but not all, classes. Work is marked regularly, and comments clearly identify strengths and points for improvement, but these vary in length and sometimes in quality. Pupils are offered, though not all take advantage of, opportunities to respond to teachers' marking and comments. Teachers use assessment information with increasing effectiveness to diagnose those needing help and direct the support of teaching assistants. In the less effective lessons seen, the relevance of activities was not clear to pupils and the demands for the most able pupils were not always high enough; tasks lacked more difficult starting points or encouragement to pupils to think creatively and engage with the activity. Although planned links between subjects are improving standards in writing and mathematics, pupils' use of information and communication technology in day-to-day activities is still too infrequent, limiting their development of this key skill.

The headteacher's ambition for the school, aided by senior leaders and the targeted support from the local authority, ensures steady improvement. Senior leaders have an accurate view of teaching quality and progress, leading to new staffing appointments to be made from September. The school is making secure arrangements for their support and induction. The senior leadership team, now comprising newly appointed phase leaders, has a clear understanding of what the school does well. Senior leaders know where improvements still need to be made and acknowledge the need to improve their own monitoring. Safeguarding arrangements are secure, but the school is reviewing these to see where any improvements can be made. Further development of the curriculum is needed in the coming term, so that pupils' interests are fully harnessed to good effect in their day-to-day work.

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements and has helped minimise disruption through the process of staff appointments and departures. There have been regular and effective visits from the local authority adviser and literacy and numeracy consultants, as well as additional support for the Early Years Foundation Stage and for special educational needs work so that these children and other older pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are supported effectively.

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

Kevin Hodge
Additional Inspector