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Headteacher
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Dear Mr Weeks

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 October 2011, for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 26 and 27 May 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Teachers' assessment information and unvalidated test results for Year 6 pupils in 2011 show that the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 in English improved on the 2010 figures and for those attaining Level 5 remained broadly similar. In mathematics the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 was in line with 2010 results and with national expectations; however, the proportion reaching Level 5 decreased. A higher than expected proportion of pupils, especially girls, did not make expected progress in mathematics.

The school's own assessment tracking information shows that a higher proportion of the current cohort of Year 6 pupils are making expected rates of progress in English from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1. However, progress in mathematics remains weaker because pupils' recall of basic number facts is less well developed and this hampers the speed and accuracy of their calculations. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2011 show good improvements in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2 in reading and writing. The proportion reaching Level 2 in mathematics has also improved and is significantly above national

average. Pupils in Year 1 made good progress as they confidently added 10 to a number; more able pupils confidently recorded a range of number sentences adding or subtracting 20.

Behaviour in lessons is consistently good and pupils show good attitudes to learning. Pupils clearly enjoyed the opportunity to construct bridges and to develop their scientific understanding through practical activities. Staff have good relationships with pupils and use praise and humour well to increase pupils' self-confidence. Teachers create a purposeful atmosphere in their classrooms from the earliest age. Teachers' skill in providing work that is matched to different abilities of pupils is improving. However, the pace in lessons is often satisfactory rather than rapid. As at the time of the last inspection, on occasion teachers spend too much time on teacher-led activities with the whole class and not enough time is spent on independent work with pupils applying their learning and practising their skills. Opportunities are also missed for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Teaching assistants provide appropriate support for less-able pupils. In guided reading sessions, pupils develop good comprehension skills and younger pupils' early letter and sounds recognition is systematically taught. The school has purchased additional reading resources and is intent on introducing a more consistent whole-school approach to encourage pupils to segment and blend their letters and sounds when encountering unfamiliar words. Targets to develop pupils' English skills, although identified, too often focus on presentation rather than pinpoint areas noted from assessments. In English lessons, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are regularly presented with lists of the key components of a good piece of writing and use these effectively to evaluate and improve their work. However, this practice is not consistently used across Years 3 and 4. In a Year 5 literacy lesson, pupils writing instructions were able to check their work to ensure they had used connectives, imperative verbs and had listed events chronologically.

School improvement has focused strongly on developing writing skills and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Shared moderation of pupils' written work has helped to raise teachers' expectations and ensure assessments are accurate. As a result, writing standards are improving across the school, but spelling and handwriting remain weak for some pupils. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully through more frequent assessments and this has been used recently to identify where pupils have made less than expected progress. This system is not sufficiently secure in providing a clear evaluation of the effectiveness of different support programmes.

Observations completed by senior leaders show that there have been improvements in the quality of teaching. Lesson observations conducted by senior leaders provide teachers with an accurate identification of strengths and areas to develop. However, in judging the quality of teaching, senior leaders do not always give enough attention to the progress in learning made by different groups of pupils.

Senior leaders have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through increasing the frequency of their monitoring of teaching and learning and the scrutiny of pupils' work. Improvements in outcomes in writing across the school and in raising standards at Key Stage 1 demonstrate the school's better capacity to improve. The previous comprehensive school improvement plan maintained a clear focus on improving English and was underpinned by frequent monitoring procedures. However, the revised plan does not yet provide clear actions or check points to address weaknesses in mathematics, especially in Key Stage 2. Procedures for the governing body to monitor progress are not clearly included.

The advice of the School Improvement Partner has been a valuable resource and has included help with moderation of teachers' assessments.

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

Mark Lindfield

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise all the teaching to the quality of the best by ensuring all activities are well paced and that progress within lessons is reviewed against tight success criteria.
- Develop the self-evaluation process and ensure all steps in new initiatives are time constrained and tightly monitored to assess their impact.
- Further develop pupils' use of targets and self-assessment so that they learn to take a greater degree of personal responsibility for their learning.