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Mr J Walker
Headteacher
Church Cowley St James Church of England Primary School
Bartholomew Road
Oxford
OX4 3QH

Dear Mr Walker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Church Cowley St James Church of England Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 December 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also thank the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Officer, the staff and the pupils who gave their time to speak to me.

Since the last inspection, there have been some staff changes. A new Early Years Foundation Stage leader and a Year 5/6 leader took up their posts in September 2010. An assistant headteacher was appointed and took up her post in September 2011. Two class teachers have left the school. Two newly qualified teachers took up their posts in September 2011. At the time of the monitoring visit, there was a long-term supply teacher in one class due to the ill health of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader. A new Chair of the Governing Body was elected in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 15–16 June 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.

Children begin in the Reception classes with skills below the levels normally expected for their age. The school's own data show that they make satisfactory progress. The school has successfully improved the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and children are provided with more opportunities to engage in reading and writing activities both indoors and outside. As a result, progress in reading and writing is

improving. The system for tracking children's progress in the Nursery and Reception classes has improved and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader and nursery teacher work closely together to plan topics jointly in order to share ideas and resources, including the joint free-flow to the outdoor learning area.

From Year 1 to Year 6, progress remains inconsistent. Recent changes to the provision for pupils in Year 1, which encourages independent learning, have a positive impact on their attainment and progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. The most recent assessments carried out by the school show that pupils in Year 1 make good progress. Results in the Key Stage 1 national assessments in 2011 show there is a trend of improvement in reading and writing. Nevertheless, attainment remains low. Results in the Key Stage 2 national tests were significantly below national averages. The rate of progress for all groups of pupils in Key Stage 2 is broadly satisfactory in reading and writing. However, the school's own data shows that in mathematics progress in Year 4 and 5 is poor. The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to secure satisfactory progress

The teaching sampled during the inspection was still satisfactory overall, with pockets of good practice. In the strongest lessons, planning is detailed and clearly identifies the needs of all pupils. Tasks set are appropriate to challenge the more able pupils and meet the needs of individuals. Pupils are given opportunities to write in a range of subjects and to develop their independence through discussions and the sharing of ideas and opinions. In most classes, useful vocabulary and prompts to support writing are evident. The use of themed weeks provides more opportunities for pupils to develop their investigative skills in mathematics and science. However, mathematics lessons did not routinely provide opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills through investigations. There is greater consistency in the use of pupils' targets. Pupils talked positively about their targets, which help them to know how to improve their work, although this was more evident in writing than in mathematics. The use of targets was particularly effective in a Year 1 class, where the targets were individually matched to the learning needs of pupils. The target card for each pupil enabled them to focus on how to improve their writing. One child successfully achieved his target, which was celebrated by the class teacher and another target for improvement was then exchanged on his target card. Although some marking supports pupils to improve their work, this remains inconsistent, particularly in mathematics. As a result, pupils' progress as seen in books is satisfactory.

The assessment system, which had recently been introduced at the time of the last inspection, provides teachers and senior staff with the information they need to track the attainment and progress of all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school recognises that inaccuracies in some assessments remain. Class teachers are beginning to be held to account for the progress of their pupils through the pupil progress meetings. But this, along with the expectation for teachers to analyse pupils' progress data, is at an early stage of development. Professional

partnerships provide coaching and support to improve teaching and assessment of skills, and develop a greater understanding of good practice.

The governing body has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has substantially increased its role in driving improvements forward. The leadership structure has been refined to ensure clear lines of accountability. The senior leadership team has been strengthened following the appointment of the new assistant headteacher. The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders now include a range of monitoring activities which are set out in their action plans for improvement. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are sound, providing senior leaders with an accurate picture of strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.

The local authority has provided a wide range of support. Professional development has focused on sharing good practice and developing teachers' skills in assessment. In addition, the governing body is effectively challenging school leaders, with regular checks on progress through a wide range of monitoring activities. This has increased the school's capacity to sustain further improvements.

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

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress in writing and mathematics throughout the school, but particularly in the Reception classes and Key Stage 1, by:
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to develop their writing across the curriculum
 - ensuring all pupils further develop their use and understanding of subject-specific vocabulary
 - giving pupils more opportunities to undertake investigations in mathematics and to work independently
 - ensuring pupils understand their targets, and how to achieve them, across all subjects.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching by:
 - raising expectations of pupils and staff by providing more opportunities to share and build on good practice
 - making more effective use of assessment information to plan work that challenges all groups of pupils, particularly the more able.
- Develop the skills of leaders and managers at all levels in contributing to whole school improvement by:
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders and the governing body fully understand their respective roles and responsibilities
 - refining their action plans to focus on outcomes for pupils
 - analysing and using assessment information to monitor pupils' progress against their targets
 - rigorously evaluating the impact of teaching on learning.