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20 January 2012

Mr Robert Holder  
Headteacher  
Ditton Church of England Junior School  
New Road  
Ditton  
Aylesford  
Kent  
ME20 6AE

Dear Mr Holder

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Ditton Church of England Junior School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 January 2012, for the time you gave to our preparatory meeting and the information you provided during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the local authority adviser and the Chair of the Governing Body who gave time to discuss the school's progress with me.

Since the inspection in November 2010, the school has been relatively stable with two changes to the teaching staff.

As a result of the inspection on 3 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 has made inadequate progress in making improvements.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Attainment in writing rose in the end of Key Stage 2 assessments last year. However, attainment in English was below the national average, and much lower than might be expected given the pupils' starting points. Attainment in reading has been falling steadily over the past four years. In addition, last year, there was a sharp drop in attainment in mathematics so that it was significantly below average. The school's in-house assessments show that the progress that pupils made in each



year group was also lower than expected with fewer than half of pupils in each year group achieving their targets. This compounded similarly low progress during the previous year. The school has sharpened its focus on pupils' achievement and regular meetings now take place each term to discuss pupils' progress and plan support. The emphasis of these meetings is on pupils at risk of not achieving the levels expected for their ages rather than whether all pupils are making fast enough progress from their different starting points. There is insufficient focus on making sure that more-able pupils are supported to achieve at the higher levels. The work in pupils' books and the lessons observed during the inspection confirm that, throughout the school, expectations about what pupils can and should be achieving in lessons and in a series of lessons are not high enough. Too often, activities lack challenge and there is insufficient scope for pupils to work independently and at length.

### **The quality of teaching**

There are elements of effective teaching across the school. Classrooms are attractive, lessons orderly and relationships are good. Teachers share the learning objectives for each lesson and generally include opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning and work collaboratively. Teaching assistants provide useful support and have an active role throughout the lessons. Teachers make links across subjects to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in different contexts. For example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson on negative numbers, the work was related to their current learning on varying temperatures in science. The lessons observed and work in books show that teachers try to make the learning relevant to pupils' interests, such as in Year 6 lessons where pupils explored arguments around the issue of graffiti. There is good evidence that teachers are using the recently devised literacy and cultural development plan to provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures.

However, despite these positive aspects, the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning are reduced for several reasons. Information from assessments is not being used effectively enough and, in many lessons, all pupils are given the same or similar levels of work regardless of their different abilities. As a result, there is too little challenge for most pupils, especially more-able groups. Too much time is still taken up with whole-class sessions where teachers engage with a few pupils, leaving large groups as bystanders. In addition, there is an overuse of worksheets and other activities which put limits on the learning and too few opportunities for pupils to use their initiative and work independently. Teachers mark pupils' books conscientiously and there are examples where success is highlighted and next steps for improvement identified. This is inconsistent and often the next steps are rather wide-ranging. There is very little evidence of pupils being expected to, or given time to, respond to teachers' comments.



## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The school's continuing high regard for ensuring pupils' safety and personal development is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and attitudes. Pupils are polite, friendly and collaborate well. In the over-directed lessons, pupils are rather passive but they respond well when they are given opportunities to be more responsible and actively involved. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, where the activity was less restricted than most, the pupils enjoyed making decisions and worked enthusiastically.

## **The quality of leadership and management of the school**

The school's plans and log of activity show that action has been taken aimed at addressing each of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. For example, the attainment of girls has been carefully analysed, there has been a variety of professional development activities for staff and action taken to improve the opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures. Teachers are now more involved in assessing attainment and analysing pupils' progress. However, the impact of actions is not effectively evaluated to make sure that improvements are actually happening. Furthermore, most targets for success are not sharp or measurable, which makes evaluation of impact difficult to measure. Attainment and progress targets for the current Year 6 group are insufficiently challenging and, if achieved, will result in continued low rates of progress.

Monitoring of teaching and learning is not regular or rigorous enough to identify the causes of lower than expected attainment and slow progress, and therefore follow-up and support are not sharply focused on what needs to improve. Subject leaders are involved in decision making but do not have sufficient opportunities to evaluate the impact of their actions or monitor the quality of pupils' learning. In addition, judgements arising from lesson observations are overgenerous at times as the focus tends to be on what the teachers are doing rather than on how well the pupils are learning.

The school has received a great deal of support from local authority advisers and consultants over the years. However, it is clear that concerns keep recurring, particularly in relation to attainment and progress. Support appears to be effective and result in improvements for a time but then these improvements are not effectively followed up or maintained by the school.

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

Sheena MacDonald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## Annex

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

- Improve attainment and progress in writing by:
  - using data more consistently to identify and provide for pupils who need extra support to reach levels above those expected for their age
  - giving subject leaders more opportunities to make use of whole-school data, monitor teaching and learning, evaluate the success of new interventions and share good practice
  - through the growing links with the infant school, establishing at what stage girls in particular begin to underachieve in their learning
  - capturing the interests of girls so that they are excited by writing opportunities.
  
- Improve teaching so that it is more consistently good by:
  - ensuring all teachers use the information gathered from the range of assessment procedures to pitch teaching at the right level for all pupils
  - checking that teachers move pupils more rapidly into independent and collaborative tasks
  - making better use of teaching assistants in the early parts of lessons
  - checking pupils' understanding more regularly during lessons
  - making the monitoring of teaching focus clearly on learning and progress.
  
- Improve pupils' cultural development, especially their understanding of the multicultural country in which they live, by:
  - providing a wider range of books reflecting our multicultural society
  - ensuring that in each year group topics and work in literacy more regularly reflect a multicultural dimension
  - putting into effect community cohesion strategies to establish links with other schools nationally in order to support pupils' understanding of the lives of children with different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.