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Mrs L Codling
Executive Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Ascupart Street
Southampton
Hampshire
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Dear Mrs Codling

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to members of the governing body who came in to talk to me and to the group of pupils who spoke so eloquently about the school. Thanks also to senior and middle leaders for finding time to talk about their specific areas of responsibility.

The partnership between this school and Portswood Primary School is still in place with five new members of staff appointed since the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 23 and 24 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 good progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment has improved year on year and was broadly average in 2011, a year ahead of the requirements of the last inspection, and remains at that level. The school now meets the government's current floor standard. Improvements have been noted across all key subjects and for all groups of pupils.



Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge below those expected for children of this age and particularly low communication and social skills. They make good progress and enter Year 1 with social skills at the expected levels but still below expectations in their communication skills.

The school's emphasis on developing literacy skills across all years has had a very positive effect on progress. This coupled with consistently better teaching ensures pupils make faster progress across the school. This is the case for all pupils, boys in particular and especially in mathematics. Pupils all achieve well.

Recent improvements in English has ensured that by Year 6 pupils' combined English and mathematics results have improved a further 10% in the current year. This is very evident in classes where pupils have a good understanding of their targets and use success criteria and assessment grids to check their own progress, as in a Year 6 literacy lesson. The presentation of pupils' work is much improved, illustrating the pride that pupils now have in their achievements, as was seen in their well-presented topic books and in Year 6 mathematics books.

The quality of teaching

The school has been successful in improving the quality of teaching. The proportion of lessons that are good and better has risen, according to the school's monitoring and confirmed by inspection evidence. Improvements have taken place because of the wide range of effective strategies adopted by the school. There is an effective use of classroom monitoring by a range of senior leaders to celebrate success and point clearly to how improvements can be made. Phase leaders and the professional development leader work alongside colleagues giving 'on the spot' suggestions for improvement or modelling these improvements for them.

Assessment information is used effectively by class teachers to group pupils and ensures that tasks are carefully planned and challenging to these groups. Better teaching is now characterised by brief introductions and very clear planning and preparation of suitably challenging activities. The pace of learning is brisk and effective questioning allows teachers to note misunderstandings much earlier. In a Year 2 literacy lesson these qualities were demonstrated well, which ensured that pupils made exceptional progress in their learning. Marking was regular and gave them very good advice on how to improve their work and allowed them opportunities to check their own learning.

The teaching of phonics (linking sounds with letters) is having a positive effect on the quality of pupils' reading and spelling. Reading is above average for many at Year 6.



Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and attitudes to learning throughout the school are positive with some examples of exemplary behaviour. This ensures that little or no time is wasted in lessons and teachers can focus solely on pupils' learning. Pupils say emphatically that they feel safe in school. 'You're never alone in this school' said one pupil. Different aspects of bullying are understood by pupils although incidents rarely happen. The appointment of an inclusions leader and behaviour team has ensured that the school keeps its focus on behaviour and the ways in which members of staff manage it. Boys and girls respect the very wide range of cultures and ethnic backgrounds of their fellow pupils and this helps maintain a harmonious atmosphere in which work and play are rarely interrupted by behavioural issues.

Attendance has improved since the previous inspection, but despite the best efforts of the school, it remains low, as some parents and carers still take their children on holiday in term time.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The partnership between Portswood and St Mary's has been the springboard for considerable and consistent improvements being made across a wide range of issues. The senior leadership team is clearly driving these improvements, with substantial support from the partnership. The executive headteacher has created an extremely positive 'can do' ethos for development and improvement and has instilled a passion and determination among the staff to achieve excellence.

At all levels teachers with responsibilities have clear roles and accept the accountability that goes with those roles. Class teachers themselves are much more accountable for assessments in their classes and linking them with the progress pupils make. Although the teaching of phonics is coordinated in each phase of the school, it lacks whole-school oversight in order to capture elements of best practice and have a wider picture of progress. The school is making very good use of a range of coaching techniques to improve the quality of teaching. These strategies are proving successful. The school is continuously addressing previous issues of underachievement so that the vast majority of pupils are attaining higher levels, and for some, exceptionally so.

The school has rigorous procedures for tackling any forms of discrimination and offers pupils an inclusive environment. The school knows its pupils well, their social and cultural backgrounds, and makes every effort to promote spiritual development within assemblies and religious education lessons. Staff present positive role models for pupils to emulate. This enables pupils, whose circumstances could make them vulnerable, confront their difficulties and make significant changes to their behaviour and learning. Members of the governing body have good oversight of safeguarding arrangements. They have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development and the Joint Partnership Committee allows for much sharing of



experiences, expertise and ideas between the two schools. Although resourcing has improved in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school is waiting for work to commence on the re-shaping of outdoor provision, currently not sufficient in space or resources.

The restructuring of senior and middle leaders, improvements to teaching and pupils' achievement and the encouragement of teachers to take on responsibilities have kept up a relentless drive for improvement. This, together with an effective programme for monitoring and drawing up an all-encompassing school development plan, suggests strongly the drive for improvement will be maintained.

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

Gavin Jones
Additional inspector



Annex

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

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics to national averages by July 2012 through the school by:
 - improving teaching strategies in these subjects
 - showing pupils what they are expected to learn in these subjects
 - giving pupils guidance about how to improve the presentation of their work
 - increasing the range of resources in all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Build on the already improved consistency of teaching through the school in the coming academic year so that at least 80% is at least good by ensuring:
 - pupils' misunderstandings during lessons are corrected
 - marking indicates to pupils the next steps in their learning
 - introductions to lessons are not too long.

- Extend the coaching model of staff improvement throughout the school by developing the skills of senior and middle leaders to accelerate progress and raise attainment in all classes.

