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Mrs A Blackburn
The Headteacher
St Stephen's CofE Primary School
Hunters Chase
Godstone
RH9 8HR

Dear Mrs Blackburn

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Stephen's CofE Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and all your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 January 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my particular thanks to the governors and pupils as well as the local authority and diocesan representatives I met.

Since the inspection, you began work as headteacher in September 2012. Three new teachers have also joined the staff.

As a result of the inspection on 11 May 2012, 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 in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils' attainment remains inconsistent between classes in English and mathematics. Overall, it is too low. However, the national test results for Year 6 in 2012 improved considerably from the exceptionally low position in the previous year. Across the school, pupils' rate of progress has continued to improve since September and most pupils now make the expected levels of progress. There remain some inconsistencies in how much progress the pupils make in different classes, however. Pupils much enjoy their lessons, behaving well and feeling well supported by staff. They are confident to discuss their learning. There are no groups of pupils who achieve markedly better or worse than others. Pupils' rate of attendance is average.

Under the clear leadership of the new headteacher, the quality of teaching continues to improve, especially in Key Stage 2. However, it still requires further improvement. Lessons are lively, usually active and fun; relationships between adults and pupils

are very constructive. Teachers explain things clearly. They follow school policies about using learning objectives and 'steps to success' consistently, so pupils know what is expected of them. Pupils with visual impairments, or other disabilities, are involved well in lessons with their classmates. However, in some lessons, teachers talk for too long without involving the pupils enough. At these times, pupils become passive. The curriculum and teaching in English and mathematics require further improvement. Pupils study a wide range of set material in these subjects but not always in sufficient depth. Moreover, too often, work is still not set at the right level for all pupils. Mainly, it does not challenge the pupils enough. In a Year 1 lesson, for example, a mathematics puzzle was too simple for most pupils. The lesson, although enjoyably and kindly taught, was slowly paced and too heavily controlled by the teacher. It did not use well enough the independent learning skills these pupils gained in the Reception class.

Verbal feedback from staff to pupils about how well they are doing remains of mixed quality. However, where teaching is at its best, as observed in the Year 6 class, pupils consider carefully how they can improve their work following discussion with the teacher. They are well engaged by skilled adult questioning and activities which are well suited to their needs. The marking of pupils' work by staff across the school is now thorough. Pupils appreciate it. However, although the marking often assesses helpfully where pupils have successfully learned a set objective, it does not always diagnose pupils' mistakes correctly or suggest how pupils can make their work better.

The curriculum in subjects beyond English and mathematics also requires improvement. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are aware of this. For example, pupils do too little exciting and challenging work in music and geography. This limits their experience and lowers expectations. In an assembly observed, pupils behaved well, as at the last inspection. They sang a hymn together tunefully and worshipfully, with enjoyment. However, to sing better still, they require more specialist musical teaching. A good opportunity to sing in parts was missed.

Middle leaders, who are responsible for particular subjects, work hard to help their colleagues by suggesting ideas, and by organising resources. They are learning their roles and do not yet lead their subjects strongly. They are often focused on their own classes, rather than on the whole school. They are not accountable for pupils' attainment in the subjects. Some subjects currently have no leader.

The headteacher shows determined, meticulous and resolute leadership. As a new headteacher, she receives appropriate induction and support from the local authority. She got to know the school quickly, expects high standards, and has sensibly built on improvements already underway. In addition, she has made some well-chosen further changes, such as improving the way the school records and monitors pupils' progress, re-forming the leadership team, and employing learning mentors. Staff are responding well to her direction. Pupils have noted that their new

headteacher is a 'doer', who makes things happen. They agree that she 'doesn't take any messing about'!

The local authority supports the school effectively. Its consultants have helped the improvements being made and its statement of action for the school is fit for purpose. The new headteacher has made this statement the school's own and taken responsibility for it. The school improvement plan is a useful working document and has guided recent positive changes. However, it is not sharply targeted on improving pupils' attainment.

The headteacher, with the senior leadership team and governors, evaluates the school objectively and mainly accurately. The improving governing body is perceptively and sympathetically led by its Chair. Governors, quite properly, now ask very demanding questions of the school, whilst being rightly supportive and encouraging of the headteacher. They are pleased with the change she is bringing; they also understand her commitment to learning and growing in the role.

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

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012

- Raise attainment and pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school, so that it meets or exceeds the government's current floor standards, by:
 - ensuring consistency in all classes in implementing recent changes in the teaching of English and mathematics
 - strengthening teachers' understanding of the interpretation and use of assessment data on pupils' progress.
- Ensure that the quality of all teaching is at least good throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that lesson planning makes precise use of assessment information, particularly that on the most and least able pupils and especially lower attaining boys
 - ensuring that pupils are given maximum opportunity to develop as active and independent learners
 - ensuring, through more effective marking and discussion, that pupils know exactly the steps to take in order to reach their next level of attainment.
- Improve the effectiveness of the school's leadership by:
 - providing middle managers with opportunities and responsibilities to help them gain more experience and confidence in leading staff through the management of change
 - ensuring that subject leaders focus increasingly on pupils' progress and overall achievement.