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Mrs Jane Hunter
Interim Headteacher
St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Mathews Close
Halstead
CO9 2BH

4 May 2013

Dear Mrs Hunter

Requires improvement first monitoring inspection visit of St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Halstead

Following my visit to your school on 3 May 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

This monitoring inspection visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, in addition to meetings with you, I held meetings with the Chair and members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the headteacher designate. The school's action plan was evaluated.

Context

A new headteacher has been appointed to take up her post in September 2013 and the post of deputy headteacher has been advertised.

Main findings

You began your role as interim headteacher very shortly before the January 2013 inspection. Your previous experience of making schools better is having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. You meet every week with the interim deputy headteacher and subject leaders for English and mathematics to monitor pupils' progress, the impact of staff training and your action

plans. You understand where teaching is already good and where it needs to get better. You have correctly identified common weaknesses such as marking. Training has already taken place and as a result, marking has improved. The headteacher designate also has a successful record of leading school improvement resulting in her current school being judged as 'outstanding'. She has an astute understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement found in St Andrew's. Some teachers have been given opportunities to see effective practice in other schools. You have helped governors to improve the usefulness of their visits. However, governors need urgent training to help them ask the right questions to challenge the school better. Your improvement plan has sharp targets to improve the school to 'good' with steps to check progress, but lacks some precision in dates for monitoring activities. It provides a useful set of requirements for all lessons. Currently, some part-time teachers do not attend staff training and are not always included in external evaluations. This is a barrier to improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure that the work of all teachers is regularly monitored, that all teachers attend whole school training and that their work is included in evaluations and reviews of the school's performance
- arrange training for governors so that they can provide better challenge
- build upon the partnerships already created with local schools
- ensure that the pace of improvement is accelerated through new appointments to leadership and teaching posts.

I will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection

External support

Partnership work with the local authority and neighbouring schools since the last inspection has contributed well to improving the school. The local authority's vital contribution since the last inspection has been to ensure a smooth and speedy transition between headteachers and ensure that effective leadership was identified and put in place quickly. The local authority is now effectively monitoring the progress of the school and providing additional experts to help teachers.

I am copying this note of visit to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector