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13 January 2014

Mrs V Barr  
Headteacher  
St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Cliffe  
Church Street  
Rochester  
ME3 7PU

Dear Mrs Barr

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Cliffe**

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen school development plans by including timescales for actions and short-term targets for each priority
- enhance the strategic leadership role of the assistant headteacher
- develop a strategy to support all staff to improve their teaching
- establish further links with good or outstanding schools.

**Agreed actions:**

The headteacher will send a copy of the updated school development plan to HMI. The Chair of the Governing Body will brief HMI on the outcome of the review of governance and send a copy of the subsequent action plan to HMI.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met a representative of the local authority. The school's development plan was evaluated and the records of checks made on the quality of teaching were looked at.

## **Context**

There have been several changes to staffing since the section 5 inspection. Two new teachers have joined the school. The coordinator for special educational needs has given up her class teaching responsibility this term and now leads this area of the school's work full-time.

## **Main findings**

Although disappointed with the inspection outcome, school leaders and governors have accepted the judgements and are determined to improve the school. They have reviewed the school's development plan and have already begun to take action to tackle the weaknesses identified by the inspection team. For example, there are now more opportunities for children in Reception to develop their learning outdoors and teachers make checks on pupils' progress more frequently. The headteacher and governing body have also reassessed the role of the coordinator for special educational needs (SENCo) to focus on improving outcomes for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

The school's new development plan is coherent and there are some clear, measurable long-term targets for pupils' achievement, but the plan lacks clear timescales for individual actions and there are no short-term targets. This means it will be difficult for the governing body to evaluate the school's progress over the coming months.

Although there is a clear leadership structure in the school, senior leadership responsibilities are not evenly distributed and the strategic role of the assistant headteacher is underdeveloped.

There is not a coordinated approach to improving the quality of teaching. Following observations and monitoring activities, teachers receive feedback on what they need to do to improve but unless significant weaknesses are identified, teachers do not receive tailored support from senior leaders.

The governing body has taken prompt action to arrange for an external review of its work, in line with the recommendation from the inspection team. This will help governors to increase their effectiveness.

HMI will carry out a further visit in the summer term and will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

In the past, the school has not always had an effective working relationship with officers from the local authority. A recent review of support has led to a change of school challenge and improvement leader (SCIL) and early indications are that this new relationship is developing well. The school has made good use of training opportunities, such as the Medway Governor Conference.

The school has established some links with other local schools, but wishes to develop further partnerships. The new school challenge and improvement leader is supporting the school in this work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Medway and the Diocese of Rochester.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles

**Her Majesty's Inspector**