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Mrs A McGarrigle  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
St Mary's Road  
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Kent  
BR8 7BU

Dear Mrs McGarrigle

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 17 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 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:

- ensure that all of the recent changes and new systems adopted by the school recently are very tightly and consistently carried out by all staff, so that they have maximum impact
- better evaluate the quality and impact of the actions taken by the school to improve the attainment of pupils entitled to the pupil premium.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and other staff, as well as representatives of the Governing Body and of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We toured the school together, visiting lessons and looking at pupils' work. I scrutinised school documents, including the

improvement plan, local authority reports on the school, minutes of meetings and data about the pupils' academic progress.

## **Main findings**

The school has improved considerably in the last year. Staff and governors have taken on board, with great commitment, the recommendations made at my first monitoring visit just over a year ago. A great deal of hard and successful work has been done. You lead the school inventively and reliably, with valuable support from the deputy headteacher and other senior teachers. Staff say that they are pleased to work here and find the changes and sense of purpose and direction invigorating. They feel both challenged to improve and well supported. The school seems in good spiritual heart. External staff training has been well targeted and has made a definite impact on practice. Staff with management responsibilities are increasingly empowered to make a positive difference.

You are able to show clear evidence, some of which I have seen first-hand in lessons, that teaching has improved. Teachers expect more of the pupils and lessons appear to be well structured and purposeful. The way in which pupils' individual needs are provided for, whether in class or in interventions elsewhere, is now sharper and better, so that most pupils are making better progress. I am very pleased again to see the breadth of the curriculum. Pupils enjoy stimulating activity in the humanities, science, technology and music, for example. Their behaviour, as I have seen it, continues to be of a generally high standard. You are rightly clear about the importance of pupils enjoying first-hand experiences outdoors and on educational visits. The daily before-school mathematics club, attended by almost all of the older pupils, is a popular and successful innovation.

These positive developments and features of the school show in the improved results at the end of all key stages in 2014, from what was a low point the year before. Pupils' progress across the school is better. The proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected level in mathematics came close to the national average. There was also some worthwhile improvement in English, though not as marked. Too few pupils reached the higher levels in both subjects. Results in Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage were acceptable and the Year 1 and 2 phonics screening results also improved, though remain below national average.

These results can be viewed two ways. Looked at by themselves, they are not good enough. Looked at in comparison to the years before, however, they show much improvement. The school needs to sustain this level of improvement this year and then into the future.

You have led a number of positive innovations and introduced helpful new systems. This has led to better and more consistent practice across the school. For example, when teachers mark pupils' work, they rightly expect the pupils to respond immediately to the marking and improve their work quickly. In the examples we

looked at today, most pupils did this but there were too many occasions when pupils did not respond to the teachers' helpful and focused marking. This is an example, therefore, of a newly developed system which needs to be put into practice more tightly: pupils should always respond.

We found some other, similar, examples of processes which need to be more tightly implemented. For instance, the school asks teachers to tell the pupils learning objectives at the start of lessons. Some of the examples of this we saw together were ineffective as they were merely descriptions of an activity, such as 'write a diary'. The targets and predictions for how well pupils will do in English and mathematics at the end of each year need to be more ambitious. This, in turn, should help sharpen further the performance management targets for staff. The school improvement plan is a useful working document, focused in the right areas, but some of its targets and objectives are not clear or precise enough to be measured and checked easily.

You spend the school's allocation of pupil premium funding appropriately and imaginatively. However, outcomes for these pupils are mixed across the school and often there remains a wide gap between how well they do when compared to their classmates. It will be very helpful, therefore, to evaluate the quality and impact of the work funded by the pupil premium more thoroughly.

The governing body is suitably organised and continues to develop its work effectively. It has made a valuable contribution to the recent improvement of the school. Governors make increasingly well-focused visits, linked to the improvement plan. We discussed together how it would be useful to highlight the challenging questions asked by governors of senior staff more clearly in their meeting minutes. This could enable issues to be followed through more quickly and easily.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority provides sufficient support to the school and has contributed well to the improvements made. Local authority staff changes mean that there will be different advisers and officers working with the school in this academic year. Sensibly, the school has decided also to employ its previous adviser for the foreseeable future to provide continuity. It is good to see that this is planned to dovetail with the local authority support.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**