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Andrea McGlew
Headteacher
St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School
High Street
Hartfield
TN7 4AA

Dear Mrs McGlew

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2014. 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:

- strengthen teachers' use of information about pupil's current achievement so that rates of progress increase
- ensure that the new curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their writing skills
- clarify how improvements will be measured.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and representatives of the governing body. I spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and I looked at a range of other documents. You led me

on a tour of the school and I visited each class. Years 4 and 5 were away from the school at their swimming lessons.

Context

Since the inspection one teacher has resigned and been replaced by a newly qualified teacher. The Chair of the Governing Body came to the end of his term of office and has been replaced. This change had been prepared for by the school. A focused drive to recruit new governors has resulted in three new appointments and two more are planned.

Main findings

You have acted quickly and very effectively since the inspection. You have rightly put in place an action plan focused on the areas for improvement, with a lead person named as responsible for each item. This plan should be further refined so that it is clear how improvements will be measured. You have been ably supported by the deputy headteacher and governors. Each area of the school's work is monitored carefully and an additional, simple tool has been created to help track developments. Governors oversee the school's work and visit regularly to check progress. The monitoring of pupils' progress is now more rigorous and this is helping to drive up standards.

Leaders have worked hard with parents to increase expectations of what pupils can achieve, and consequently levels of ambition are rising. 'Meet the Teacher' sessions, an open door policy, a fortnightly newsletter and the use of direct e-mail have increased the school's communication with the parents. A fresh start was made in September with teachers receiving clear information about what each pupil knows, understands and can do in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are increasingly using this information to support their work.

Ambitious targets have been set for the coming year as standards were, again, too low in 2014. Teaching is improving because leaders have set clear expectations about how lessons will be planned to take account of pupils' different starting points. Leaders are changing the curriculum to enable teachers to provide better opportunities for pupils to practise their writing. Teachers work more closely together following the re-structuring of staff that took place in July. They now share ideas, resources and materials, and as a result stronger practice is spreading. This re-structuring has meant also that pupils in Year 6 have made a good start, and pupils in Year R are benefitting from the greater experience and skills of the teacher now teaching this class. Activities are well planned, enabling pupils to make better progress towards the learning goals. In Year 6, time is used well to increase pupils' progress in mathematics while their Year 5 classmates are receiving swimming lessons. As a result, progress is accelerating in these year groups.

The behaviour and safety of pupils has improved quickly since the inspection. This is due to changes made to the way that the playground is supervised and incidents are recorded. Leaders are better able to check patterns of behaviour. Supervisors are clearer about their roles and intervene sooner to ensure that any issues are nipped in the bud. You have provided all staff with a clear and concise handbook which sets out responsibilities. Support for the management of a few pupils' behaviour has been sought from professional services external to the school and this is contributing to improvements.

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 has rightly increased its focused support for the school. It has provided an additional six days of consultancy to check the effectiveness of teaching, especially in Year R, the impact of changes to staffing and to further drive improvements by challenging school leaders. The governors have benefitted from re-organising their work following a systematic analysis of their skills carried out by a professional consultancy. As a result, their work now supports the drive for improvement. The school makes good use of the local Crowborough and Village Alliance, which is a collaboration of a few schools. For example, work has been moderated by members of the alliance so that teachers undertake assessment with greater confidence.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector