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2 February 2018

Mrs Jill Hine  
St Margaret's Church of England Primary School  
The Mardens  
Ifield  
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West Sussex  
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Dear Mrs Hine

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

Following my visit to your school on 17 January 2018, 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 April 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to secure greater pace and consistency of improvement by:

- sharpening the focus of leaders at all levels, including governors, and through all improvement activity, on whether pupils are making consistently strong enough progress
- maintaining a clear and timely overview of the extent to which current pupils are making consistently strong progress across the school
- using this information to pinpoint areas for further improvement
- evaluating the effectiveness of actions in the school plan by whether they make enough difference to pupils' outcomes.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, phase leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. I spoke informally with a small number of parents and carers at the start of the day. You and your deputy joined me as we made brief visits to eight classes, including the Nursery provision. During these visits, I spoke with pupils and reviewed a range of their work. I also reviewed a small selection of pupils' books separately, including some that your staff provided. Both during and after our meetings, I sampled a range of the school's documentation relating to our discussions. This documentation included: records of leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment; records and tracking of current pupils' outcomes; minutes of governing body meetings; phase leaders' files; and reports of the external reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding.

## **Context**

Ten new teachers have joined the school since the previous inspection, some of whom are part time. A new deputy headteacher joined the senior leadership team in March 2017. One of two assistant headteachers is currently on maternity leave. A new chair and vice-chair of governors were elected mid-autumn term 2017. In addition, two new governors have joined since the previous inspection. The Nursery provision no longer requires separate registration by Ofsted and is now included as part of the school's inspection.

## **Main findings**

While there have been more convincing strides in some areas, the overall pace of improvement is too slow and inconsistent. Leaders and staff are working hard to move the school forward. However, they do not focus sharply enough on the right things when checking the effectiveness of their actions. In particular, there is not enough emphasis placed on whether pupils make sufficient progress. For pupils reaching the end of key stage 2 last year, their progress was broadly average in mathematics, but significantly below average in reading and writing. Pupils' progress in reading across key stage 2 has remained in the bottom 20% nationally for the last three years. Standards at the end of key stage 1 fell in 2017 and placed pupils in the lowest 10% compared nationally. Disruption to teaching, linked with repeated changes in staffing, means that these pupils are not catching up well enough in Year 3. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved strongly over time, but the Year 2 outcomes fell in 2017.

Leaders and governors do not have a clear overview of pupils' current progress at their fingertips. Their own analysis shows that, up to the end of the previous academic year, pupils' progress remained too variable. You are confident that teachers keep a close check on each pupil's progress. However, during my visit, you

were not able to demonstrate convincingly the extent to which pupils across the school are making sufficiently strong progress this year. The random sample of books that we reviewed during and after our shared learning walk showed that progress was variable and not consistently strong enough for pupils to catch up.

You admit frankly that teaching is still not consistently strong enough across the school. There are clear indicators that some very effective teaching identified at the previous inspection has been sustained. Senior and phase leaders have striven with much success to ensure a consistency of approach to different aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. However, leaders do not check the difference this makes in each class to pupils' learning and progress closely enough. There is no doubt that pupils and teachers work hard, but there is not enough scrutiny of whether pupils are making enough progress over time to achieve as well as they could. During our learning walk, pupils were typically well engaged, demonstrating positive attitudes and keen to talk about their learning. Pupils and parents I spoke to like the behaviour system and said that it works. Your own analysis and tracking of this confirm that this is so.

The school's action plan systematically covers all of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Leaders have reviewed this regularly to identify where insufficient headway has been made and taken further action accordingly. This typifies the lack of complacency among leaders. However, the measures included in the plan to help you see if improvements are on track are not specific enough about how quickly or by how much pupils' outcomes should improve. Leaders have also taken steps to address areas of weakness that have emerged since the previous inspection, such as reading, although this is not reflected in the action plan. The school's own records show that reading standards have risen sharply in two year groups where new strategies were trialled. Although these approaches are being rolled out more widely now, it is too soon to see the difference being made.

Improvements in mathematics are further advanced and more secure than in other subjects. Clear-sighted subject leadership, external expertise and local authority support have all contributed to this journey. Phase leaders are enthusiastic, committed and keen to help the school get to where it needs to be. They are receptive to, and reflective about, the areas where they could sharpen their work to make a bigger difference to improving pupils' progress. Leaders have worked together to manage the inclusion of the Nursery as part of the school. Leaders report that this has aided children's smooth transition, and evidence you provided indicates that children are well prepared to achieve well in Year 1.

Governors are strongly committed to the school and determined that it will improve. They are unafraid to challenge school leaders as well as support them in their efforts to drive improvement. However, they focus too much on pupils' attainment rather than their progress, which means they are sometimes falsely reassured by improvements in some of the school's performance statistics. Governors are not adept at knowing the right areas to probe to be more rigorous in their role.

## **External support**

The external reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding were carried out promptly. The governance review triggered a change in membership and stronger understanding of the role of governors. The pupil premium review affirmed some of the positive work of the school for disadvantaged pupils and contributed to the evolution of careful checking of the difference made by specific interventions. However, disadvantaged pupils are affected by the same variabilities affecting the rest of the school. In addition, the statement on the website about the use of pupil premium funding is weak. For example, it does not identify the barriers to better outcomes these pupils may face, or outline specific measures to check whether the spending of additional funding has been effective.

Leaders and governors speak positively about the support and challenge provided by the local authority. However, this has not helped school leaders to see sooner how they may have adjusted their approach to secure faster improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**