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Ms Charlotte Brown
The Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Ascupart Street
Southampton
SO14 1LU

Dear Ms Brown

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff provided me with when I inspected your school on 14 June 2007, for the time you allowed for our telephone discussion and for the information which you made available before and during my visit. Please also convey a particular thanks to the pupils I spoke to as their views were particularly interesting and have been taken into account.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on November 2006, the school was asked to improve the following areas.

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching, ensuring that lesson activities are matched closely to the needs of all pupils so that they are always challenged to do their best.
- Increase the pace of change in order to bring about more rapid improvement.
- Improve attendance by ensuring that all parents are clear about the impact that absence from school has on their child's progress.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing almost all of the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievements.

Teaching in the school is now satisfactory and improving and pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are also better than at the time of the last inspection. As a result, standards in English, mathematics and science are rising, albeit at a faster rate in some areas and in some year groups than in others. Older pupils in upper Key Stage 2 are now making good progress.

Teaching is taking better account of the different learning needs of pupils and activities are more appropriately matched to these needs. The best lessons observed were well structured and learning objectives were clearly understood by pupils. New concepts were taught in a meaningful context and pupils were provided with sufficient time to apply new learning. Teachers made good use of questions to check pupils' understanding and correct misconceptions. They also made effective use of visual aids and classroom displays to enhance learning. Some teachers made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their teaching.

Weaker aspects of some lessons included insufficient explicit teaching and use of key vocabulary. Missed opportunities for pupils to share, discuss or rehearse ideas resulted in pupils being unable to articulate their thoughts or explaining themselves clearly. Some teachers spent too much time talking, and at times they are unnecessarily loud. The introductory part of less successful lessons was too long and this slowed down the pace of learning. In addition some tasks were not challenging enough for the more able pupils. Nevertheless, in all the lessons observed the relationship between staff and pupils was good and additional adults provided effective support.

Teachers' subject knowledge in English, mathematics and science is also improving and they demonstrate a more secure understanding of the level descriptors within programmes of study. This is helping them to make better use of targets as a strategy to help raise standards. However, this has yet to be firmly embedded throughout the school in a way that is meaningful and purposeful to all pupils.

The school has correctly identified the need to provide training for staff in the use of intervention strategies to help accelerate rates of improvement. This has yet to be extended to the teaching of phonics which is not currently sufficiently systematic or rigorous. Furthermore, despite the focus on raising standards in English, planned opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills as well as their reading and writing skills are not yet sufficiently well established across the curriculum.

The quality of leadership and management in the school has improved; there is a better understanding of roles and responsibilities and higher expectations of all staff and this is helping to bring about more rapid improvement. The senior leadership management team (SLMT) have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are tracking the progress made in improving the quality of teaching and learning well. However, when undertaking lesson observations senior leaders do not always make sufficient judgments about progress and standards or the achievements of different ability groups.

Leadership is distributed more evenly throughout the school although the impact of middle leaders is variable. The best progress has been in the support provided to staff by the SLMT as well as by the English subject leader. Despite improvements in leadership and management, there is still a need to improve the quality of some of the action plans. These documents do not all clarify sufficiently well the intended

outcomes for learners or provide measurable success criteria to inform judgments about the progress of targeted groups.

The Ofsted action plan is proving a helpful document which is helping to drive improvement. The Task Group and the local authority (LA) have also helped the school to remain sharply focused on the key issues in need of improvement and have provided the school with good detailed feedback about the progress being made. The overall quality of external support since November 2006 has been satisfactory although the quality of support for teaching and learning has been good.

Despite some improvement in the levels of attendance of targeted groups, the progress made in improving whole school attendance is inadequate. The support for the school in helping to improve rates of attendance has not been sufficiently rigorous or timely. Attendance remains below the national average and rates of authorised as well as unauthorised absences are still too high.

The school has appreciated the support it has received from the LA especially in helping leaders and managers to fulfil their roles and responsibilities more effectively and in improving the quality of teaching and learning.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector