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Mrs C Wills
The Headteacher
Ashlands Church of England First School
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Dear Mrs Wills

Ofsted Monitoring of Grade 3 Schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 5 July 2007, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I appreciate the warm welcome I received and I would be grateful if you would pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils and governors.

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 22 May 2006, the school was asked to:

- provide more opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility, develop their independence, and be more involved in making decisions within the school
- develop more robust ways of improving attendance
- develop whole-school assessment procedures and improve teachers' marking so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.

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

This good progress is being secured through effective leadership of the school by the headteacher. Her resolute drive for improvement sets a clear direction for the school. She is well supported by a strong and committed senior management team. Of particular note is the reflective and measured approach the senior leaders have adopted to securing progress. Clear identification of priorities and systematic programmes ensure that there is a shared sense of purpose across the school, that

improvements are carefully introduced and paced to ensure they are firmly embedded. This focused, supportive approach is valued by staff.

Good progress has been made in formulating and implementing whole-school assessment procedures. The deputy headteacher is making a significant contribution to this work. Analysis of pupils' progress and the standards they attain is thorough and is being used to determine appropriate whole school priorities, for example the focus on improving pupils writing. Clear strategies for the early identification of pupils requiring additional support are ensuring that interventions matched to their needs are secured. The impact of these interventions is regularly monitored and evaluated.

Considerable work has been undertaken on the setting of individual pupil and class targets particularly in reading and writing. Thorough work on assessing pupils' writing is making a valuable contribution to this initiative. Improving the use of assessment in the planning of teaching and learning rightly continues to be a priority of the school. Good initiatives, such as the use of success criteria for lessons, are beginning to reap benefits. For example, Year 4 pupils talk confidently about how they use them to check how well they are doing. Good practice exists in marking, for example Year 4 pupils value the 'success and advice' system because it effectively combines praise and help on what to do next to improve their work. Marking across the school, however, does not always effectively support pupils' learning and further work is scheduled in the autumn term to address this issue.

Recent positive improvements in the reporting procedures reflect the need to provide parents with clear information on the progress being made by their children and the standards they attain.

The successful introduction of the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) project has helped pupils to understand more about themselves and to take increasing responsibility for their behaviour and learning. Pupils know that taking responsibility and caring for others lie at the heart of the school's Golden Rules. They value the opportunity they have to nominate other pupils to reward them for the help and support they show to others. Another good example is pupils' exploration of the value of peaceful resolution of conflicts and Year 4 school council members are trained to help others achieve this if disputes arise in the playground.

Pupils enjoy learning when they have to be independent and solve problems for themselves or in groups such as in the Forest School, the garden project and during science week. Not all opportunities for pupils to be responsible for their learning in lessons, however, are being exploited.

The school council, established in the autumn term is valued by pupils. Its elected members clearly know it is their responsibility 'to get things done'. They base their work on 'plan, do and review' and they are making a difference. They are most pleased with the 'buddy stop' for the playground which makes sure that everyone has someone to be with at playtime. The school has made good progress in helping

pupils to accept responsibility, become more independent, and be more involved in making decisions in school.

More rigorous systems for improving attendance are in place, with the school working closely with the education welfare officer. Attendance is in line with the national average. Careful monitoring of attendance and methodical processes for following up pupil absences mean that the school is on track to meet its' target for 2006 to 2007. A notable difference in improving attendance since the previous inspection is the school's more robust response to requests for pupils to have holidays during school time. The school is now planning to build on the good progress it has made, by introducing further strategies that involve parents and pupils, to promote attendance.

The school knows what it needs to do to keep improving. There is a strong determination to build on recent gains and the capacity to do so is good.

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

Yours sincerely

Valerie Pearson
Her Majesty's Inspector