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11 January 2010

Mrs Margaret Cooke
St John's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cooke

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 December 2009, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I greatly appreciated the way in which you and Mrs Quirk ensured that my visit was productive.

Since the previous inspection in December 2008, St John's has entered a 'soft' federation with Chiddingstone Primary, a nearby school judged 'outstanding' in its most recent inspection. In September 2009, the headteacher at Chiddingstone Primary was appointed as executive head for both schools and a head of school was appointed for St John's. There is a new chair of St John's governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 10 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards by improving teaching and its impact on learning and by using targets in improvement planning
- refocus the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum so children have more opportunities to learn through play and to make choices about their own learning
- improve rates of attendance.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained progress.

The school has made good progress in raising expectations, developing teachers' skills, using targets to inform planning and raising standards overall. Levels of attainment remain below national averages but there has been an upward trend since 2007. Numbers of pupils in most year groups are small, so circumstances affecting one or two pupils have a marked impact on the overall statistics. Many pupils enter with lower prior attainment than expected for children of their age. They

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make good progress to reach standards below, but not exceptionally below, national averages by the end of Year 2. Standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 6 have improved overall since 2007, especially in English.

Consultancy, well-directed support from the local authority, relevant in-service training and modelling of good practice by teachers from the partner school have built up a shared understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. Planning builds on pupils' current levels and the development of assessment strategies is improving pupils' learning. Most marking of written work combines praise with guidance on how to improve, and its impact can be traced in pupils' books. Teachers understand the importance of encouraging independent learning, although on occasion their wish to be encouraging leads them to miss opportunities to challenge and clarify pupils' thinking, especially that of more able learners.

Current leadership and staffing in the Reception class and Year 1 have made good progress in developing children's learning through play. It was clear that children felt safe and enjoyed tackling activities in which they felt they could achieve something worthwhile, such as model-building and art work or pitting themselves successfully against an interactive computer program. Teachers and teaching assistants are developing confident skills in supporting rather than directing learning during 'children's choice' sessions. They take productive advantage of opportunities to reinforce earlier learning through well-directed questions and keep detailed records of each child's progress.

The school is developing strategies to improve attendance, with a focus on encouragement rather than sanctions. Considerable effort is being put into strengthening communication with families so that they appreciate the damage that irregular attendance does to children's overall achievement. Progress in improving attendance is satisfactory and is building up momentum as more parents respond to opportunities to participate in school-run activities and develop a more positive attitude to what the school has to offer them and their children.

Based on realistic analyses of strengths and weaknesses and with well-grounded confidence in the school's potential, school's leaders are having a positive impact on teaching and learning and on the day-to-day running of the school. There is a widely shared and ambitious vision and morale is buoyant, supported by the school's improvement partner and the local authority and by the partner school in the federation. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - chair of governors/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – except for academies
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.schools@dcsg.gov.uk)
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

Lead inspector