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Mr David Stott
Headteacher
Michael Syddall Church of England Aided Primary School
Noels Court
Mowbray Road
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Dear Mr Stott

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 December 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff, governor and local authority staff who gave up their time to talk to me.

As a result of the inspection on 3 and 4 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve achievement and raise standards in English and mathematics, particularly at the higher levels
- improve the consistency of teaching, including the marking of pupils' work
- sharpen monitoring and evaluation systems so that they are more accurate.

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

The school has responded positively to the issues identified at its inspection in December 2008. The unvalidated results of the national tests in 2009 indicate that standards in English rose to above average and in mathematics to broadly average at the end of Key Stage 2. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 5 has remained similar to last year, below average in mathematics but slightly above that found nationally in English. Provisional teacher assessments at the end of

Key Stage 1 in 2009 also rose from significantly below average in 2008 to broadly average. More pupils attained the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics but no pupils attained the higher Level 3 in writing. The school's own data, pupils' current work and lessons seen during the inspection indicate that pupils are now beginning to make better progress from their starting points. However, the school is aware of the need to ensure a consistent and sustained trend of improvement throughout the school in order to raise standards further, particularly in writing and for more able pupils. Approximately one-fifth of pupils are from service families stationed at a nearby garrison, some of whom have English as an additional language. A much higher than usual number of pupils join or leave the school at times other than the start of the academic year. This is managed well by the school and pupils are quickly assessed and appropriate targets are set for them.

The amount of good and better teaching has increased since the last inspection and some strategies, such as sharing with pupils what they are to learn, are now more consistent across the school. As a result, the proportion of pupils making good progress in lessons has increased. In the best lessons, work is well planned to ensure that pupils of all abilities are properly challenged, including more able pupils. There are more opportunities for pupils to practice their skills in literacy and numeracy in other subjects across the curriculum and cross-curricular work is evident in pupils' books. A rigorous tracking system has been introduced. This enables teachers to identify any pupils who are underachieving and swift action is taken to address their individual needs to help them to achieve as well as they can. In lessons seen, teaching assistants were well deployed to support teachers and strengthen pupils' learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and pupils are often asked challenging questions to extend their thinking. There is a brisk pace to these lessons which keeps pupils motivated and interested. However, there is still a small amount of satisfactory teaching and work in some pupils' books is limited and sometimes unfinished. In these lessons, pupils make satisfactory progress as there is not enough time for them to practice their skills or consolidate their learning. Occasionally, evaluations of pupils' learning do not always make explicit the individual pupils on whom staff may need to focus as a result of previous assessment.

Assessment strategies are effective and pupils appreciate the 'spider diagrams' which clearly identify what they are to learn and how they can achieve. Pupils are often involved in assessing their own and classmates' work. This was demonstrated when different groups of pupils read poems to the rest of the class. Pupils made thoughtful comments about how well each group had done and what they could do to improve their performance. There are better opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in speaking and listening, often through 'talk partners' and they also have more opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their learning. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in lessons, they co-operate well with one another and they have positive attitudes to learning. They say their lessons are fun and that they feel they are getting the help they need to improve. There are good relationships between staff and pupils. Marking and feedback has improved

and teachers consistently identify what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. However, opportunities for pupils to respond to marking are not always evident.

The school has worked hard to improve systems of monitoring and evaluation to ensure they are more accurate. There is now regular analysis of pupils' progress through the scrutiny of work and planning, as well as evaluation of assessment data. Lesson observations by the headteacher and senior leaders now focus more on the progress made by pupils. The school has been supported effectively by local authority advisers and consultants in this work and now the judgements made by senior leaders are more accurate. The targets for improvement are precisely identified within the school improvement plan so that progress on these areas can be measured effectively. Senior leaders are now more confident in identifying necessary improvements and this has enabled them to take prompt action to address them. Actions to overcome weaknesses in teaching and learning have been successful and as a result, pupils are beginning to make more progress and standards are beginning to rise. However, although there has been a strong focus on improving outcomes in mathematics and English, particularly in reading, the school is aware that further work is still needed to improve the quality of writing and ensure that higher ability pupils continue to be challenged.

The capacity for sustained improvement is good because of the success already evident in improved outcomes for pupils and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. This is because of the determination of the headteacher, governors and senior leaders and the commitment and enthusiasm of all of the staff. The skills of monitoring and evaluation within the leadership team are now more focused and accurate and as a result, the school has shown a strengthened capacity to manage improvement. Good support and challenge has been provided by the local authority through consultants, local authority advisers and the school improvement partner. The local authority has worked effectively with senior leaders and governors to create a clear plan for improvement which has been implemented effectively and the school has responded positively to the professional support provided.

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

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector