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Mr V Hillier-Nickels
Acting Headteacher
Martock Church of England VA Primary School
Elmleigh Road
Martock
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Dear Mr Hillier-Nickels

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 September 2010, for the time you and your senior colleagues gave to our pre-inspection discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to all those teaching and non-teaching staff, members of the governing body and the school improvement partner who gave up their time to talk to me.

The headteacher who had taken up post shortly before the last inspection has left the school and has been replaced by an acting headteacher. The acting headteacher took up post formally in September but was seconded to work with the other senior leaders for a period of time towards the end of the last academic year. There has been a drop in pupil numbers and this has led to some rearrangements in class groupings.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 June 2009, the school was asked to bring about improvements in three main areas.

- Ensure that the governing body formally agrees the development plan so that they are able to hold the school suitably to account and meet their statutory requirements.
- Ensure that the school's development plan and self-evaluation processes are in place and used to drive improvements forward.
- Share the best teaching practice effectively and improve the use of assessment information, including marking, to involve pupils more in understanding their targets and speeding up the progress for higher attaining pupils.



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

The judgement of inadequate progress arises not only from the slow progress in addressing the targets from the previous inspection but, more significantly, from the school's failure to raise attainment and accelerate the rate at which pupils make progress at a sufficiently rapid rate. The drop in attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2009 was repeated in 2010. The school's data for 2010 show that the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 and above in both English and mathematics was considerably below the targets set and agreed by the school. These data also show that the proportion of all pupils making the expected levels of progress was below the national average. A closer analysis shows that lower-attaining pupils made better progress than their peers and that all pupils made better progress towards their school targets in mathematics than they did in English. Since September of this academic year, there has been an appropriate increased focus on the development of literacy, and on writing in particular.

Pupils' books scrutinised during the monitoring inspection indicate that most have completed a significant amount of work already this term and the first major piece of written English work completed shows that some higher-attaining pupils can write well. Their work is extended and they make good use of a range of grammatical structures and vocabulary and use accurate punctuation. The quality of learning observed in lessons was at least satisfactory. Pupils participate well in lessons and work well in groups when given the opportunity. Their behaviour, which had been a concern, is good and is managed well by teachers so that learning is not disrupted.

Teachers' planning has improved following intensive work in the previous year and all lesson plans have specific and appropriate learning objectives. Pupils are clear about what they are to learn. Not all teachers are, however, effective in consistently meeting the needs of all groups. In some classes, pupils' needs are being very well met by carefully targeted work and by the use of well-directed learning support assistants. In other classes, too much work is being completed as a whole class rather than in pairs, groups or independently. Marking has improved in the last term. It is detailed and very regular. Teachers are consistently using the agreed colour coding which identifies clearly what pupils have done well and what they need to improve. This system is well understood by pupils and is particularly helpful when targets are reviewed by teachers. Specific guidance on exactly how pupils might improve their work remains variable and overall is satisfactory.

In the past, pupil progress reviews, although informed by the use of data, have been insufficiently rigorous. The newly installed data systems and the clear and challenging targets set for each class will provide better support for teachers, who already show confidence in the clarity of the target-setting process.



Since the inspection in June 2009, initial progress in making improvements has been very slow and has only accelerated recently, particularly under the leadership of the acting headteacher. The governing body has played a pivotal role in securing the leadership of the school. Recognising that the pace of improvement was too slow and that staff morale was low, they took swift action to address weaknesses in leadership and management. They made, and continue to make, very good use of local authority personnel and financial support.

The acting headteacher's arrival has been well received by staff and pupils. The systems the acting headteacher has put in place have engendered a strong feeling of team work. The school development plan, which was in place by the beginning of the school year, is well informed by a detailed analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development. Staff have been well involved in its creation. The plan is an effective document which sets clear and appropriate priorities for the school. Not only does it describe clearly the steps the school needs to take over the year but it identifies the staff development and resourcing which are so crucial in improving classroom practice. Reports to the governing body make good use of data analysis and provide a good level of information to support an incisive level of challenge.

The whole-school focus on literacy is already having an impact on pupils' work. The initial piece of work completed by all pupils as a baseline assessment has provided teachers with a very clear picture of what each pupil can already do and of what they need to do better.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2009

- Ensure that the governing body formally agrees the development plan so that they are able to hold the school suitably to account and meet their statutory requirements.
- Ensure that the school's development plan and self-evaluation processes are in place and used to drive improvement forward.
- Share the best teaching practice effectively and improve the use of assessment information, including marking, to involve pupils more in understanding their targets and speeding up the progress for higher-attaining pupils.