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16 October 2013

Mrs Moira Duncombe  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Church of England Primary School  
Ashford Road  
Tenterden  
TN30 6PU

Dear Mrs Duncombe

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael's Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that senior leaders, governors and teachers know how much more progress pupils who have underachieved in the past need to make so that they catch up
- raise expectations about what pupils identified with special educational needs can achieve
- link performance targets for teachers more precisely to the progress that all pupils need to make in different classes to achieve well
- use performance management arrangements and the information from the monitoring of teaching and learning to hold staff accountable for the improvements needed, tackling underperformance swiftly

- check that actions are making a difference, including the use of the Pupil Premium funding, and take steps quickly if they are not
- make sure governors are provided with all the information they need in advance of meetings so that they are well-prepared to ask probing questions, challenge and support the pace of improvement.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I had meetings with you and the deputy headteacher and four members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation also took place with the local authority improvement adviser. We walked around the classrooms and I looked at a range of documents that you provided for me which included information about the progress that pupils make in different classes and subjects, notes of visits from local authority consultants and the report on a recent external review of governance. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

## **Context**

There have been no significant staff changes since the section 5 inspection although some teachers are now in different year groups.

## **Main findings**

Valuable time has been lost to drive improvement forward more quickly. Senior leaders have spent too long preparing forms to record lesson observations and other monitoring activities, developing a complex system to track pupils' progress and drawing up a plan for improvement. Developing such systems has been at the expense of taking steps that have made enough difference to improve teaching and learning.

Despite the efforts to strengthen how the school monitors pupils' progress, there is a lack of clarity about the information that is collected and the progress that pupils need to make in different year groups and subjects if they are to achieve as well as they should. This lack of clarity means that although teachers have annual performance targets, they are not linked specifically enough to improving the progress of all the pupils in their classes based on a precise understanding of how much lost ground they need to make up. Expectations of pupils that the school has identified with special educational needs are not high enough. The amount of progress that these pupils are targeted to make is unjustifiably lower than other pupils.

A programme for senior leaders to check the quality of teaching throughout the year has been drawn up but not implemented quickly. Some joint lesson observations have been carried out with the local authority mathematics consultant. Not all teachers benefited from being given feedback on how they could improve following

these observations. Weaknesses in teaching and leadership identified in the section 5 inspection are not being tackled with sufficient urgency so improvements have been limited.

The governing body has established a core group of governors to monitor the progress that is made in addressing the issues identified at the last inspection. However, they are not provided with all the information that they need in good time to prepare for meetings and ensure they are equipped to ask probing and relevant questions. Some information that they are given is incomplete, for example in relation to pupil progress, which limits their ability to hold staff accountable for the quality of teaching and learning.

The local authority has taken too long to complete its review of the school's governance. The review looked at documents provided by the governing body but no discussions were held with governors to get to the heart of issues which are hindering their effectiveness. The outcomes of the review have only just been received so the governing body has not yet had an opportunity to consider and act on its findings.

I will carry out further monitoring visits to look at the quality of the school's checks on teaching and learning and how effectively information is being used by you and governors to hold staff accountable for improvements. Where necessary, Ofsted may provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority adviser has helped the school to draw up an appropriate plan for improvement and arranged relevant support from Early Years and mathematics consultants to improve teaching, focused particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1. Teachers have been enrolled on relevant courses to improve their classroom practice to good or better. Local authority officers have concerns about the school's slow progress and gaps in the information that the school provides. However, these concerns are not always explicit in records of visits sent to you and governors; this is unhelpful. Support from other local schools in the area to improve teaching and leadership is only just being exploited and governors could benefit from these links too. Consequently, external support has not strengthened leadership at the school sufficiently to tackle weaknesses identified at the last inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director of Education, Learning and Skills for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Krafft  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**