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4 March 2014

Ms Carolyn Chivers
Interim Executive Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School (Tenterden)
Ashford Road
Tenterden
TN30 6PU

Dear Ms Chivers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael's Church of England Primary School (Tenterden)

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 second 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure governors have arrangements in place to hold current leaders to account for the improvements needed
- enable staff and governors to attend any relevant Ofsted improvement conferences that become available.

Evidence

During the visit, I had meetings with you and two senior leaders, three members of the governing body and your local authority school improvement adviser to discuss the action taken since my last visit in October. The school improvement plan was evaluated. 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, records of lesson observations, the school's self-evaluation, notes of visits

from local authority advisers and governors, minutes of governors' meetings and their monitoring action plan.

Context

There have been significant changes since my last monitoring visit. The headteacher left unexpectedly at the end of November. The deputy headteacher led the school from that point until Christmas. The local authority secured your support as the interim headteacher of St Michael's from January until at least the end of the academic year. You are also the permanent headteacher of another school. The special educational needs coordinator is now teaching in Year 1 for four days each week and has joined the senior leadership team. Senior leaders have one day every week to work together on leadership activities. One member of staff is on long-term sick leave. The English and mathematics leaders are new to these roles. Two parent governors have resigned and there is a new clerk to the governing body.

Main findings

In the short time you have been leading the school you have provided much needed clarity about how the necessary improvements are going to be made. This is rebuilding the confidence of staff, governors and parents and beginning to make a difference to moving the quality of teaching and learning forward.

The areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and issues raised at my last visit have been given the right priority. The marking policy has been rewritten by the mathematics leader with support from the local authority consultant. You and your deputy have observed lessons and checked pupils' books to make sure that the policy is being followed more consistently. You have identified that more still needs to be done to make sure that pupils respond to the teachers' comments.

Carefully tailored support, advice and guidance are beginning to help teachers to improve their classroom practice and build the skills of other leaders in the school to support them. Staff have visited other schools to see for themselves what the most effective teaching and learning looks like. Advisers and other teachers are then working alongside them in their own classrooms to help improve the pace of learning. Assessments of pupils' work are being checked with teachers from other schools to make sure that they are increasingly reliable.

Expectations of all pupils, including the most able and those with special educational needs, are being raised. A new system to manage information about the progress that pupils make has been introduced so that teachers know precisely what is expected of every pupil in their class. Regular discussions with senior leaders challenge teachers to identify what needs to be done if pupils are not making the progress that they should. Information shows that some pupils are beginning to

make faster progress but this is not consistent, particularly for some pupils who have special educational needs.

Arrangements to manage teachers' performance have been strengthened and their targets are more closely linked to pupils' progress. Teachers are clearer about how they will be held accountable but the process has not been completed for teaching assistants. The updated school improvement plan includes the key priorities, relevant actions, timescales for completion and milestones to check that the school is on track to meet its targets so is a useful tool for leaders and governors. Governors have not considered how they will manage the performance and hold current leaders accountable so that they build their skills to do this more effectively in the future.

Following issues raised at my last visit about the quality of the external review of governance, a meeting has taken place between governors and the local authority governor support service. The meeting helped to clarify governors' understanding of their roles and responsibilities, provided practical advice and identified further training needs. Governors have started to implement a short-term monitoring plan linked to the school's key improvement priorities. Their visits to the school are being linked to these priorities. Governors are talking with staff and pupils so are beginning to see for themselves what is being done to improve teaching and learning. They receive more timely information so are better prepared to ask probing questions in meetings.

Governors must make sure that the recent improvements are sustained and secure the long-term leadership of the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will make a short visit in the summer to look at what further progress has been made.

External support

The local authority acted quickly to strengthen the school's leadership following the departure of the previous headteacher. Under your careful direction, governors and staff are benefiting from the well-planned support and training from local authority advisers and other schools, including a teaching school. Continued support is needed to build on the recent improvements and make up for time lost in the autumn term. Governors and staff should consider attending Ofsted conferences to improve governance, mathematics and help the school get to good at its next 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