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18 February 2011

Mrs J Overs
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE VA Primary School
Wintringham Road
St Neots
Cambridgeshire
PE19 1NX

Dear Mrs Overs

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Mary's CofE VA Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 February 2011, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Thank you also to the governing body representatives who found time to come to school to speak with me.

The headteacher took up post in January 2010, shortly after the last inspection. Apart from this change in leadership and the appointment of some new members of the governing body, there have been no other significant changes in the school's context.

As a result of the inspection on 16 November 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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 improvement.

Standards of attainment have, in recent years, been below age-related expectations, both at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Results in end of Key Stage 2 assessments in 2010 showed slight improvement when compared with the previous year but were significantly below average, particularly in mathematics. The gap in attainment with national figures reflects the children's often very low starting points on entry and the



school's high level of pupil mobility. A significant number of children join the school at times other than the start of the year or key stage, often having had a disrupted educational experience.

Despite significant challenges, the school is on a clear trajectory of improvement. Its rigorous assessment information indicates that standards are rising strongly so that end of key stage results in 2011 are likely to be broadly in line with national figures. Evidence from lesson observations confirms this upward trend. Pupils' work and school tracking data show that pupils of all ages are making accelerated progress in lessons and over time. This improved progress is the result of better provision, more effective use of assessment and the impact of strong strategic leadership and very effective day-to-day management.

The curriculum has been reviewed and strengthened. The creative curriculum, in particular, is more sharply focused and provides effective and imaginative opportunities for pupils' personal development and for the consolidation of their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Lessons are consequently more sharply focused on specific learning outcomes that are properly shared with the pupils. In the best lessons, the teachers are inventive in their use of resources and plan excellent activities to actively engage all the pupils in learning. Teachers' use of assessment has become a notable strength. Marking is detailed and helpful. Importantly, the pupils have a dialogue with their teachers and respond to the guidance given. Pupils are, from an early age, encouraged to be independent and to think for themselves. They develop the confidence to volunteer answers and also to ask questions and even challenge the teacher! The use of peer and pupil self-assessment is beginning to further engage the pupils in the process of improvement.

The headteacher has provided fresh impetus and sharper focus for staff. Leadership has been strengthened at all levels. Within a short time, the headteacher has made a considerable impact on improving outcomes by raising the aspirations of pupils, parents and staff. She has skilfully galvanised the abilities and energy of all staff so that their collective efforts can improve outcomes across the school and embed strategies for raising standards at each key stage. In particular, pupils' attitudes to learning have been nurtured so that their attendance has improved and they develop the motivation, self-confidence and independence to succeed. Great care has also been taken to engage the support of parents through better communication and guidance. The homework challenge booklets and family learning days, for example, have given parents positive guidance and confidence in how to support their children's learning. Responses from parental surveys confirm the positive impact of the school's work over the last year.

Action to strengthen the school's provision and outcomes has been concerted and effective. Senior leaders, managers and the governing body have an accurate picture and understanding of the school's strengths and its priorities for further improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate and its procedures for monitoring performance are rigorous.

The school values the good support provided by the local authority, particularly the challenge and guidance of the school improvement partner and also its support for collaborative initiatives and the outreach work with parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' vocabulary, comprehension and understanding of the rules of grammar and sentence structure by ensuring that all adults consistently model correct usage of English, particularly in day-to-day discussions with pupils.
- Ensure that when planning and delivering lessons, teachers place a sharp focus, closely linked to the National Curriculum attainment targets, on precisely what pupils need to do to improve their work.
- Build on existing good practice to promote pupils' social development by focusing closely on developing pupils' skills as independent learners.