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Revd Ellis
St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School
Barnard Road
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Chelmsford
CM2 8RR

Dear Revd Ellis

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 July 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the members of the governing body and pupils who gave their time to meet me.

A new headteacher took up post in September 2010. There have been other changes to the teaching staff since the last inspection. The acting headteacher at the time of the last inspection has returned to her post of deputy headteacher. In December 2010, the school gained the International School Award foundation level.

As a result of the inspection on 20 May 2010, 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Unvalidated results for the 2011 national Key Stage 2 tests show pupils' attainment to be similar to that of last year. Attainment in 2010 after the last inspection represented a slight improvement on the previous year, bringing results back to the national average and showing particular improvements in mathematics. The group of pupils taking the 2011 national tests had lower prior attainment than Year 6 in 2010.

The last inspection took place during a period of transition and some staffing turbulence. The acting headteacher at the time has supported the new headteacher in leading the school's improvement. There exists more positive morale within the school. Improvements in the quality of teaching and the curriculum have not shown

September 2010



through in terms of impact on raw test scores. However, the impact can be seen in the strong attendance and punctuality and in the school's externally moderated information on pupil progress. Leaders and teachers have raised their expectations of rates of pupil progress and, particularly in Year 6, progress has been rapid. The legacy of past underachievement has resulted in this rapid progress leading to only average attainment. The school recognises that many of its pupils, and especially boys, could do even better, particularly in writing.

Joint observations with the headteacher revealed an astute understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. The school has successfully introduced a programme of professional development and coaching as recommended in the last inspection report. During this monitoring visit, all five lessons seen were at least satisfactory. In all lessons, there was good behaviour, and good relationships between pupils and what that they describe as 'friendly teachers'. Some of the curriculum was imaginative, such as teaching numeracy and literacy to Year 5 through a World War 2 themed 'evacuation day'. Learning in Years 3 and 4 followed up a farm visit. These lessons were enjoyable and engaging. Where lessons were only satisfactory, the pace of learning was too slow, often resulting from the way the lesson was organised or the weak quality of questioning.

The school is, rather belatedly, responding to national initiatives such as the use of phonics to teach reading. Other common primary school techniques to enhance teaching and learning, such as a policy of no hands up to enable the teacher to target questions appropriately, or the use of talk partners, are used with varying degrees of confidence. Teachers are now aware of a range of teaching techniques that are likely to foster good learning but these techniques are not currently part of some teachers' natural toolkit. Teachers are aware of the need to plan activities to enable all pupils to make good progress. Whilst expectations of what pupils can do have risen, sometimes the work set is still too easy.

To address the issue of helping pupils to develop a better understanding of national and global communities, the school has made links with schools in other parts of England and made use of its Church status to link with a school in Kenya. The work is still in the developmental stage and it is too soon to see significant impact. On the other hand, Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically about recent work on India and work last year on China.

There has been good progress in enabling more members of the governing body to play an active part in school development. A delegation of seven governors met the inspector during the school day. The governor link with specific areas and aspects of school life has been restored. Members of the governing body visit the school and work with pupils and teachers, for example involving governors, pupils, teachers and other staff in a curriculum planning event. A combination of governors' direct experience of being in school and governor training is leading to them being much better placed to participate in school evaluation and improvement. Governors were able to give the inspector a long list of strengths and improvements but were

realistic enough to set the list in the context of the school's need to improve the academic achievement of its pupils.

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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010

- Improve teaching and assessment by:
 - providing less experienced staff with relevant training and mentoring
 - ensuring lesson planning provides learning opportunities and support that enable all pupils to make good progress.
 - improving marking to develop pupils' learning with more opportunities for pupils to respond to guidance.
- Help pupils develop a better understanding of national and global communities by:
 - implementing proposed links with a contrasting urban school in Britain
 - forming links with overseas schools and other links.
- Enable more governors to play an active part in school development by:
 - reinstating governor links with specific areas and aspects of the school
 - participating in school evaluation and improvement at an earlier stage in the process.