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Kim Hall
Headteacher
St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Toppesfield
Church Lane
Toppesfield
Halstead
CO9 4DS

Dear Mrs Hall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School Toppesfield

Following my visit to your school on 24 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. 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:

- implement with more urgency the plans agreed with the local authority to develop subject leadership;
- consolidate the monitoring of teaching so that:
 - it focuses even more on accelerating pupils' progress
 - it promotes consistently good attitudes to learning, such as pupils' sense of curiosity and eagerness to learn.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and the assistant headteacher. I met the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority standards and excellence commissioner. I also spoke to the adviser from the Diocese of Chelmsford. I

evaluated the school's post-Ofsted action plan and other documentation. We carried out brief visits to all classes and spoke to teachers and pupils about their work.

Context

The Year 5/6 teacher has just been appointed assistant headteacher to strengthen the leadership team.

Main findings

The school is making steady progress towards becoming a good school. Soon after the inspection you took swift action to draw up a post-Ofsted action plan to tackle the weaknesses identified, focusing particularly on the marking of pupils' work and matching activities more closely to pupils' ability. With the support of governors you drive improvement through frequent reviews of the progress made against your key priorities. As we visited classes, I noted consistency in the approaches used to provide pupils with feedback on what they need to do to improve. I saw high levels of concentration in the Year 1/2 class where pupils were trying to find difficult words in their dictionaries. The new phonics programme and the review of groupings are already showing positive impact on pupils' progress. In the Year 3/4 class pupils were proud to show me that the work in their new exercise books is now neater and they could explain clearly what they were doing and why. As a result of higher expectations good progress is being made in raising the standards of pupils' written work. There is scope for pupils' good behaviour to be exploited more fully to improve their attitudes to learning, such as giving pupils more opportunities to ask questions and inspiring them to have a thirst for knowledge.

With governors you are tackling weaknesses with determination. Your priorities and actions are relevant to the needs of the school and governors are checking progress at regular intervals. We jointly reviewed your post-Ofsted action plan and we discussed how you could evaluate its effectiveness more succinctly and provide a summary for governors to show more clearly the difference your actions are making. You are aware of the challenges posed by gaps in pupils' knowledge in some classes and you are taking steps to accelerate learning for these groups.

You have sound systems in place to monitor the quality of teaching. You are ensuring that monitoring is frequent and helpful to staff. The effectiveness of this work should be consolidated by focusing your evaluation more tightly on pupils' achievement and checking whether teaching promotes a thirst for knowledge and exploits pupil's good behaviour to develop a love for learning. As a small school, you are finding that improving subject leadership is a challenge and your senior leadership team is very new. Consequently, progress on this issue is limited.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You welcome the practical support that two school improvement partners provide. You draw readily on the advice from local authority advisers and the standards and

excellence commissioner. It is too early to see the full impact of these interventions on pupils' achievement but, already, teachers plan more challenging work for their class and, in the Early Years Foundation Stage, careful consideration is given to the effective use of the indoor and outdoor areas. The local authority set up an improvement board before the inspection, but this was not done early enough to prevent slippage in the quality of teaching and standards. In addition, the intended local authority training for subject leaders has not yet happened and, consequently, their impact on improving teaching and learning is not yet demonstrated.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex and the education adviser for the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector