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Dear Mrs Slough

Ofsted survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 17 and 18 November 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of leadership to sustain improvement in all schools in the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without your agreement.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, local authority representatives and pupils; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Context

The federation consists of St Alphege Church of England Infant and Nursery School and St Alphege Church of England Junior School. The formal federation between the two schools took place in September 2010. There have been significant changes to staffing and also staff reorganisation and restructuring.

Outcomes

- Attainment is above average overall and this level has been maintained since the federation began. Pupils' writing by the end of Year 6 is steadily improving as the focused strategy across the federation increases its impact. Although boys are beginning to improve in their overall achievement they have not yet caught up with the girls who consistently make good progress.
- Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their attitude and behaviour are exemplary. Pupils say that they are proud to be members of the school community. The Christian ethos in the federation is evident particularly through the care, guidance and support where every child matters. Pupils are very active in the life of the federation; for example, being members of the eco and school councils as well as acting as mentors to younger pupils. Pupils enjoy attending the schools in the federation and have positive attitudes to learning and a wider sense of community. They are extremely polite and eager to discuss the range of opportunities that they are given to develop their communication, leadership and independence skills.
- The federation is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes for a growing number of vulnerable pupils and their families as a result of the continuity of federation provision. This provision is further enhanced by the strong working relationships between the Infant and Junior school. The two schools are working closely with outside agencies to ensure that their children receive the best support that can be offered.

Provision

- The quality of teaching in the federation has improved across the two schools as a result of sharing the expertise and experience of the teachers and support staff. Newly appointed teachers are supported well. They have settled quickly and are contributing well to the federation's agenda of raising pupils' overall achievement and attainment.
- The federation has developed an effective tracking system for monitoring and evaluating the progress of every pupil. This helps to ensure that there are clear systems for communication between staff and other partners across the federation. Teachers use this information effectively to plan

lessons that meet the needs of pupils. Parents and carers are kept fully informed about the progress of their children. Parents regularly join with their children for special classes. For example, during the inspection visit it was noted that every parent and carer joined their child in Year 2 for a lesson in numeracy.

- Professional development is at the heart of the federation. Staff are given every opportunity to develop their leadership and management skills as well as further improve the quality of teaching. Examples of outstanding teaching observed across the federation included the inclusive approach and swift pace of lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of a range of strategies that enable them to meet the needs of individual pupils.
- The broad and balanced curriculum ensures that all pupils experience a wide range of learning opportunities within a vibrant learning environment. The curriculum is being developed even further at Key Stage 2 through a thematic approach which is in its infancy. The themed approach to writing days such as Everybody Writes Day, is having a noticeable impact. As one boy noted: 'I was enjoying myself so much that I didn't notice how much I wrote by the end of the day. I had great fun.' The impact of this strategy is already evident in the progress that the boys are making in their writing. It is planned to roll out this theme and other initiatives across the federation.
- The federation has enabled the available finance to be used flexibly so that specialist staff are shared to ensure consistency and avoid any duplication. Similarly, the shared assessment procedures, particularly at transition between Key Stages 1 and 2, are being embedded in order to further develop the continuum.

Leadership and management

- The federation is led extremely well by you and an effective leadership team is being established. The strong, clear and decisive leadership demonstrated by you has fostered a strong sense of common purpose among all staff. Both schools in the federation have a clear view of their strengths and areas for further improvement through their school self-evaluation.
- Leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of their work with precision and are regularly building on good practice. The federation is aware of the issues with the writing of a small minority of vulnerable boys and is looking to establish a range of ways to fully engage and inspire them. The development plan for the federation is detailed and is ready to be shared with the stakeholders before being fully implemented.

- The leadership is able to offer greater flexibility when deploying staff between schools to support learning. This has been successful for temporary and permanent moves between the schools in the federation. The advantages resulting from this are that pupils receive provision of a consistently high quality and staff are gaining valuable insights and experience.
- The governing body has been steadfast and resolute in bringing the two schools together. It demonstrates a clear understanding of, and ambition for, the benefits that the federation will bring to all stakeholders. The diocese has been very supportive of the federation and was influential during the initial stages of its formation. The school has received appropriate support from the local authority as and when needed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the federation's strategies for improving further the overall achievement and attainment of boys' writing.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector