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Dear Mr White and Mr Capel

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you both for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 and 17 November 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation. Please pass on my thanks to the local authority representative, the parents and governors that also gave up their time and made a valuable contribution to the visit.

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 consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements 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 Beacon Federation consists of two first schools: Cutcombe Church of England and Timberscombe Church of England. They were federated in April 2007. Each school is led and managed by two separate headteachers with equal status. One governing body oversees both schools. The schools are also members of a 'soft' federation with the Exmoor Coast Federation consisting of a local group of first and middle schools.

Outcomes

- The strong track record of consistently high levels of attainment has been sustained and consolidated.
- Pupils' progress has continued to be outstanding because the extended capacity of the federation has enabled additional support and intervention to be provided effectively for all pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage and finish in Reception with skills, knowledge and understanding higher than those typically expected of their age.
- Pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those known to be eligible for free school meals make outstanding progress because of the effective individual support they receive.
- Pupils are excited and interested in their learning across the federation. They respond positively to the different environments and teachers. Their behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to talk about the 'fun' they have in 'their federation'. They all talk about the friends they have made and the extended social groups they experience.
- The transition between schools, as pupils get older, is smoother as a result of the well-planned activities between schools which have fostered pupils' well-developed social skills and confidence. Most pupils' attendance is good.

Provision

- The consistently good teaching is enhanced and developed by the many opportunities to work collaboratively. A clear teaching and learning policy underpins the practice of the federation. The membership of the 'soft' federation has extended further teachers' repertoires and strategies.
- The development of teachers' skills in areas such as assessment, Early Years Foundation Stage, mathematics and literacy has benefited from the professional development opportunities available.
- The curriculum has been enhanced significantly by the federation. All subjects have been enriched extensively and developed to provide exciting learning opportunities for all pupils. Literacy and numeracy are developed well across other subjects. Additional activities, including field trips and visits, have extended pupils' learning in a remarkable fashion. As a result, pupils are excited and enthusiastic about their learning.
- The outstanding care welfare, health and safety are strongly underpinned by the federation because of the wider range of agencies, services and training available to meet the needs of individual pupils and their families.

Leadership and management

- Your dynamic partnership has enabled both schools to develop and improve by engendering a palpable and cohesive sense of purpose across the schools and their respective communities. Your vision and ambitious approaches enable the schools to connect productively with a wider federation. Your commitment to your schools' needs has developed a wide range and depth of consistency in provision without losing the individual identity of each school.
- The capacity of the middle leaders is developing well. The federation has provided many opportunities for staff to develop their responsibilities both within and across the schools.
- The governing body demonstrates an outstanding ability to drive forward the vision for a way of working that extends beyond each school. There is a depth of understanding regarding both schools' needs for the future which is based on their children's and the local communities' needs.
- A range of monitoring and evaluation activities provides a detailed but generally informal knowledge and understanding of what the federation does well and what its priorities are. However, there are few examples of a formal, systematic and rigorous approach to analysing and identifying the measurable benefits and areas for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- develop and embed systems and processes which provide a systematic, precise and detailed analysis of the difference the federation makes to pupils learning experiences.

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

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector