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18 December 2012

Miss Kathryn Crawford  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School, Banbury  
Southam Road  
Banbury  
Oxfordshire  
OX16 2EG

Dear Miss Crawford

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School, Banbury**

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 18 December, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the governing body, the school's improvement officer from the local authority, and a group of pupils. The school action plans were evaluated.

**Context**

There have been no significant changes to the school's context or key staff since the monitoring inspection.

**Main findings**

School records indicate that the quality of teaching continues to improve following a determined effort to eradicate inadequate practice. A new system of staff appraisal

has been introduced to ensure that all are focused on the key school improvement priorities of raising standards in English and mathematics through better teaching.

School action plans have been developed which directly identify methods of addressing the key areas for improvement arising from the last inspection report. A lot of useful initiatives are identified but the plan is not always clear about the timescales for their introduction or completion, to ensure a measured and manageable approach. Criteria are identified for measuring the overall success of the plans, but there are not enough intermediate targets or 'milestones' against which progress towards those goals can be measured.

The governing body has taken a determined approach to addressing the shortcomings identified both in the Section 5 inspection report and an external review of governance undertaken by the local authority five months earlier. During this period, new governors have been appointed, including the Chair, with significant education or business expertise. Governor training on monitoring and supporting school improvement has been markedly strengthened, and governors visit more regularly to find out about school provision. As a consequence, governors are clearly asking more questions of school performance and requesting clearer information to hold the school to account. While their monitoring work has strengthened, the school action plans do not clearly identify how and when governors and others will evaluate the success of the school's approaches and where adjustments may need to be made.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- sharpen the targets and success criteria throughout the school's action plan, ensuring that clear milestones are established at which point success can be measured
- establish specific opportunities for key personnel who monitor the school's provision, including governors, to evaluate its progress against targets and identify new priorities for improvement
- distribute leadership more widely across the staff to develop the capacity to improve across the whole school.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The local authority's school improvement officer provides detailed and helpful scrutiny of the work of the school. Her termly reports identify clearly to governors and school leaders the school's successes and key priorities for improvement. As a result of this careful monitoring, the local authority has been able to provide

effective, bespoke support to the school in key areas. This has been particularly effective in support for the Early Years Foundation Stage, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and for literacy and numeracy programmes, including the drafting of a new calculation policy. The school is actively involved in the local Banbury partnership of primary and secondary schools, enabling teachers and leaders to discuss, see and share effective practice. The headteacher also actively seeks input from schools and agencies in other areas to promote aspects of good practice for example in support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**