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20 March 2013

Mrs S Rowson
Headteacher
Churchmead Church of England (VA) School
Priory Way
Datchet
Slough
Berkshire
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Dear Mrs Rowson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Churchmead Church of England (VA) School

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 19 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, other members of the senior team, the seconded headteacher from a neighbouring school, the Chair of the new Interim Executive Board (IEB) who also represents the local diocese, the interim head of education and childcare in the local authority, and a local authority secondary adviser who is working closely with the school. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Following the previous inspection in November 2012 the local authority suspended the governing body's right to a delegated budget, the headteacher resigned and you became acting headteacher until summer 2013, and the governing body was replaced with an IEB. The local authority also took action to have greater power over staffing and exercised its right to require the governing body, and subsequently the IEB, to enter into arrangements with a view to securing improvements in the performance of the school. Consideration is being given to the school's conversion to academy status.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority has taken swift and decisive action since the publication of the previous inspection report to enable the school to move forward. This includes the secondment of an experienced headteacher from a local successful school to offer strategic oversight, a reorganisation of the school's senior team, the dissolution of the governing body and its replacement with an IEB, and the support of a secondary adviser for three days per week to assist with the development of teaching and learning. These actions have resulted in rapid changes and a new, but already palpable, sense of momentum.

A senior member of the local authority chairs a strategy group which meets fortnightly and maintains close oversight of how improvement strategies are making a difference to the quality of education of students in every year group. This group holds you and your senior staff closely to account for driving these improvements. They oversaw the formulation of the local authority's statement of action and the school's action planning which, as a consequence, are both very thorough and well-focused documents and are also usefully aligned. The new Interim Executive Board has yet to have its first meeting but the chair is already closely involved in school improvement strategies and works cooperatively with the local authority and with school staff. There is a good representation of skills and experience among this new group. Plans to turn the school into an academy are in the early stages of discussion; key stakeholders are involved and they are clear that the best interests of students and the community are paramount in any such decision.

The seconded headteacher has given the school's senior team a sense of strategic oversight which it previously lacked. The skills and capacity of the team are now being marshalled effectively towards common and appropriate ends as everyone is beginning to understand how their work complements that of their colleagues and contributes to better standards. Levels of accountability of staff are improving; staff are beginning to be held to account for all aspects of their work, including their

performance. New systems to improve the quality of teaching have been introduced by the seconded headteacher and are already being operated with thoroughness and consistency by the senior team. There is a new-found security in judgements of the quality of teaching, and much stronger links are forming between these judgements and with meeting individuals' and teams' needs. These changes in the expectations of the conduct and performance of staff are improving morale.

The needs of the significant number of students arriving at times other than the start of Year 7, some with specific social and learning needs, are being re-evaluated with an expansion in the work of the Personalised Learning Centre and a shift in its emphasis from simply meeting the social needs of new students, to enabling them to make rapid progress as quickly as possible. Strategies have been put in place to ensure that marking is done with more consistency by all teachers, so that students can benefit from a more consistent approach to feedback. There are plans to institute a similarly strong response to the need to drive up students' standards of literacy and the quality of their presentation of written work. The urgent need to address a legacy of underachievement in Year 11 is recognised, and their examination success is being given high priority; there is a range of intervention and support strategies in place for these students to support them to do as well as possible this summer.

Parents are being kept informed of developments in the school by a 6 weekly newsletter and the opportunity for individual meetings with you every week. Parents are not yet involved strategically in moving the school forward, but the local authority and the seconded headteacher are conscious of the significant role they will play at the appropriate time.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made: the local authority statement of action is fit for purpose; the school's improvement plan is fit for purpose; the school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, with the single exception agreed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Windsor and Maidenhead, and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Oxford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector