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27 March 2013

Ruth Leach  
Acting Headteacher  
St Blaise CofE Primary School  
School Lane  
Abingdon  
OX14 4DR

Dear Mrs Leach

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Blaise CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013, 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The inspector also had a discussion by telephone with the local authority's head of school improvement. The school improvement plan was evaluated and other documents were scrutinised, including records of lesson observations and work scrutiny.

**Context**

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the inspection. The acting headteacher continues to cover the role of special educational needs co-ordinator and class teacher as well as that of headteacher, although her teaching role has reduced to one day per week. The governing body has started, but temporarily halted, the process of recruiting a permanent headteacher.

## **Main findings**

The acting headteacher has responded positively to the findings of the inspection and moved quickly, along with governors, to address key areas for improvement. The school improvement plan is detailed and thorough. It is underpinned by clear targets for pupils' achievement and a regular process for measuring gains in their progress and attainment. However, success is not clearly enough described in terms of what good teaching and learning will look like. In its current form, the plan is unwieldy and contains too much operational detail. The headteacher is spending too long updating it on a two-term rolling programme and this is a potential distraction from addressing its key priorities.

The headteacher continues to be stretched by the demands of running a very small school and therefore carrying a number of roles. Plans are in place to develop the leadership capacity of all members of the school in order to lighten this load, although these are in their early stages and require training and development to become fully effective. Members of the governing body who are also former headteachers are making a useful contribution, for example by coaching teachers in how to develop their practice to be consistently good. Records of this, and of scrutiny of pupils' work, show that teaching and learning are being regularly monitored, with indications of some improvements in practice, although this varies.

The governing body is keenly aware of the need to stabilise the leadership of the school by appointing a permanent headteacher. This recruitment process has begun, but is currently on hold, pending the full involvement of local authority and diocesan officers.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take 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:

- reinstate the process of appointing a substantive headteacher at the earliest possible opportunity, making full use of local authority and diocesan expertise and advice to ensure that recruitment is transparent and fair
- streamline improvement planning by creating a single document, which separates strategic aims from operational detail and which specifies what success will look like in terms of pupils' learning and achievement
- ensure that coaching and training to improve the quality of teaching is underpinned by robust performance management, so that all members of the school are held firmly to account for their part in its improvement.

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

## **External support**

The local authority provides the support of a school improvement adviser, who has worked alongside the headteacher to develop improvement planning and to evaluate the quality of teaching. It has also brokered support from other schools, for example by arranging visits to observe outstanding practice. The local authority funded adviser works collaboratively with the diocese education officer and together they provide additional leadership capacity and expertise to the school. The governing body recognises the need to draw on this more consistently to inform and complement its decisions about how best to move the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside

**Her Majesty's Inspector**