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12 July 2013

Mrs S Rowson
The Acting Headteacher
Churchmead Church of England (VA) School
Priory Way
Slough
SL3 9JQ

Dear Mrs Rowson

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

Following my visit with Carol Evatt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 July 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that, at this time:

- the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures
- newly qualified teachers may be appointed by agreement with me.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012.

- Rapidly eliminate inadequate teaching and improve the quality of teaching so that learning in more lessons is good and outstanding by:
 - ensuring that expectations of what students can achieve are higher and that work is hard enough for all students across the very wide range of ability
 - establishing a consistent whole-school approach to marking and giving students regular feedback that helps them to make progress more quickly
 - making learning more exciting and involving students more actively in lessons
 - improving lesson planning and the use of homework
 - giving teachers effective training to support them in improving the quality of their lessons.
- Raise students' attainment and particularly that of boys, so that standards are at least in line with national averages in the vast majority of subjects, including English and mathematics, by:
 - evaluating the impact of the use of pupil premium funding and taking rapid action to improve its use where necessary
 - making sure every teacher and subject department takes responsibility for the development of students' literacy skills, including reading, vocabulary, handwriting, punctuation and spelling
 - improving the quality of support provided for students in lessons and ensuring that work for those who have special educational needs matches their needs.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - deepening senior leaders' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses so that their assessment of what is actually happening is sharper and more accurate
 - ensuring leaders and managers analyse students' performance data more effectively to identify key academic priorities
 - enabling subject leaders to take more effective responsibility for promoting good teaching
 - ensuring that managers hold a realistic balance of responsibilities.
- Improve governors' understanding of performance data and the quality of teaching, and ensure they hold the headteacher to account for the impact of spending decisions and students' progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 July 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the acting headteacher and other senior staff, middle leaders and other teachers, students, the Chair of the IEB and other governors, and a representative from the local authority. Seventeen lessons were observed, many jointly with senior staff.

Context

Since the previous visit a new headteacher has been appointed and will join the school in September. The post of deputy headteacher has been advertised and interviews will take place in the autumn term. The school is fully staffed for September.

Achievement of students at the school

- Standards are improving in Key Stage 4. The school's current projections of examination outcomes for the current Year 11 show small, but important, improvements in key measures from 2012. Underlying analyses of the progress made by students point to some stronger trends than these modest gains in attainment suggest, with the possibility of pleasing improvements in the proportion of students having made expected progress in English, and boys' progress in both English and mathematics having improved. Forecasts also suggest that students eligible for free school meals will have made similar progress in mathematics to last year, but better progress in English.
- The differences in the achievement of students who started the school in Year 7 and the relatively high proportion who join later have been analysed closely. Students who arrive at the school later than Year 7 usually make better progress, despite some being at an early stage of learning English, because of their more positive attitudes to learning. This is dependent on the extent of the personal and social needs of new students in each year group, however. Addressing the academic needs of students joining Years 8 to 11 will continue to be a priority area for the reorganised Personalised Learning Centre, to be called The Compass Suite from September.
- Extra funds, such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up premium, are being carefully allocated now to benefit eligible students. Governors are aware of their responsibility to evaluate the impact of the use of these funds and there are mechanisms in place to enable them to do so in future.
- Systems in place to monitor students' achievement are good, and they enable senior staff and middle leaders to monitor the progress of potentially vulnerable students, including those who are eligible for free school meals. This is beginning to make a difference to the achievement of these groups, and to improve the progress they make so that gaps in achievement are closed.

- The progress made by students in Key Stage 3 remains a concern, particularly in mathematics and English. This is due to the concerted responses to driving up achievement in Key Stage 4 drawing energy and resources away from Years 7 to 9, and some staffing problems. Senior staff, governors and students are all aware of the need to improve the quality of learning in Key Stage 3.
- The weak literacy skills of many students are being addressed. Key words are being reinforced in several subjects to extend students' vocabulary, and their knowledge and understanding of essential technical language is an appropriate priority in many classrooms. Some teachers are encouraging students to speak up in lessons, at greater length, and in more structured and formal ways. This is helping to address the lack of confidence of many students, and it supports their learning well.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. No clear trends of improvement are apparent in the achievement of this group of students yet. Those with English as an additional language receive structured support from the school, supported by the local authority. Some more-able students do not currently make sufficient progress to achieve the highest grades at GCSE. The achievement of these groups of students in every year group will be examined during the next visit.

The quality of teaching

- Although the proportion of good or better teaching has remained steady since the previous visit at around 60%, more constituent good practice is becoming evident. Teachers are keen to improve their teaching skills and many are benefiting from the individualised approaches to improving practice used by the senior staff and through the very good support provided by the local authority adviser. As a consequence, much of the teaching that is not yet good has the capacity to become so.
- Some inadequate teaching remains, but the well-organised programmes to support weaker teaching are having good impact.
- Expectations of students' achievements are higher now, prompted by the good quality analyses of achievement in all year groups undertaken by senior staff. Students mentioned that more was asked of them in lessons, in their comments to inspectors.
- Senior staff judge the quality of teaching accurately and provide good quality diagnostic feedback to support improvement. Some teaching graded by the school as good was judged as requiring improvement during the inspection visit, because staff are not yet employing all of their developing skills fluently.
- Not all of the teaching is capitalising on students' better behaviour. For example, too many teachers are still planning lessons that involve them teaching the whole class the same work for most of a lesson. When teachers use group work and encourage students to tackle problems for themselves, students respond with interest and enthusiasm, and many make much better good progress as a result.
- Teachers use a variety of assessment methods to gauge the quality of learning, and usually do so accurately. Too few respond by setting different work for

students who are progressing at different rates. Again, this limits the progress of some, particularly the more able.

- Marking and feedback to students are now consistent across the school. Students value the clarity of the feedback they receive, and the frequency with which their work is checked. More could be done to ensure that they act on the advice given. Homework is more easily monitored and organised through the on-line Show My Homework scheme, and this is appreciated by parents.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

- Students' behaviour around the site is usually calm, respectful and friendly. The students describe standards of behaviour as improving and say that bad behaviour is not tolerated. One made a point of saying to an inspector, 'I really think it's improved since last year.' Students credited the acting headteacher and her team with having brought about these improvements; the more consistent response by staff to any student's misbehaviour is also a major factor.
- In lessons, students are usually attentive and interested in their work. They show commitment to doing well and are willing, if rather passive, learners.
- Attendance is steady and is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Too few students with special educational needs supported at school action plus attend school reliably.
- The number of students receiving fixed term exclusions has decreased. This sanction is used strategically and there is evidence of it having a positive impact on behaviour and attitudes.
- The acting headteacher manages any potentially serious safeguarding problems, and community-related issues, with skill and sensitivity. She and the senior team always act in the best interests of students and their families.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

- The acting headteacher and other senior leaders have continued to develop their capacity to plan and enact strategies to bring about successful changes at whole-school level. They now work as a close and coherent team and lead the school with significantly more confidence and poise. There is still much to be done to bring about the necessary improvements in achievement and in teaching, but they have demonstrated the capacity to rise successfully to the challenge.
- Training for teachers has been re-designed to meet each individual's needs. Teachers benefit from support from a range of opportunities to extend their skills, including one-to-one coaching, trios of staff working together on extending similar classroom skills, good quality feedback following formal and 'drop-in' observations by senior staff and middle leaders, and opportunities to see good and outstanding practice in other schools.
- Middle leaders speak now of there being a much stronger culture of accountability. They understand the opportunities they now have to improve standards in their areas of responsibility by working with senior staff, and they are beginning to rise to the challenge. Heads of English, mathematics and science have more opportunity to concentrate on developing teaching and

learning in their own areas now that they no longer have oversight of other, unrelated, subjects. They have also been given more time to do this and are using this time in lessons, working with teachers to drive up achievement.

- Senior staff have begun to involve parents more closely in the work of the school. The parent forum has scrutinised the school's action plan, newsletters are regular, and opportunities for parents to learn how children are taught information and communication technology and literacy have been trialled successfully this year. The school is aware of the potentially powerful support that parents can offer, and senior staff have plans to develop this further next year.
- Development plans identified areas of need accurately. Key strategic documents are currently being rewritten by the incoming headteacher. There is the intention to maintain the momentum of the current planning, but introduce new tactics to reflect changing priorities as the school improves.
- The five governors that serve on the IEB have established good policies and practices in the school over the last two terms, and have undertaken frequent monitoring of the progress the school has made against its main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. They demonstrate a good knowledge of the school's current strengths and development needs and provide good levels of challenge and support.

External support

The local authority continues to provide high quality support and challenge to the school. An adviser is working closely with a number of departments to improve the quality of teaching, and another is working to assist the school to improve students' literacy skills. Their assistance is expert and effective, and it is greatly appreciated by staff. Senior staff in the local authority demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school's situation and work well with the school and the IEB to improve provision for students as quickly as possible. The school also works closely with a local teaching school and has plans to extend this work next term to improving provision for the most able.