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12 September 2013

Patricia Gurton  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England School  
Keen Close  
Fairford Leys  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP19 7WF

Dear Mrs Gurton

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen improvement planning so that intended outcomes are expressed clearly in terms of how children's learning and progress will be improved
- develop a clearer cycle for the evaluation of the improvement plan so that governors can more readily challenge whether targets have been met and whether actions have had a positive impact on achievement.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. We visited all lessons and talked to some children about their work.

## **Context**

Since the inspection, two teachers have left. Two newly qualified teachers, one experienced teacher and one Advanced Skills Teacher have been appointed. One member of staff is on long term sick leave.

## **Main findings**

Along with your governing body, you are keenly focused on the rapid improvement of the school. Expectations of what the children can achieve are much higher than in the past and this is beginning to show in test results, which, in 2013 showed a marked improvement in writing, especially for boys.

You have taken difficult and uncompromising decisions about changes in staffing to benefit learning. You are intolerant of weak teaching; since your arrival, there has been a turnover of about half the staff. Teachers unable or unwilling to improve their practice have left. All staff now understand their responsibility for ensuring that all children make good or outstanding progress. You hold everyone strongly to account for this. Pupil progress meetings check on whether all children are on track and teachers no longer pass automatically through pay thresholds if they do not meet achievement targets. Your key message, that you 'can't live with even one pupil not doing as well as they should', is understood loud and clear.

Teaching is evaluated routinely and rigorously. Teachers receive feedback on their individual strengths and weaknesses and coach one another to improve in specifically targeted aspects of their work. The assistant headteachers add strength to your leadership by monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning closely and providing support to teachers to improve. The recently appointed Advanced Skills Teacher is beginning to contribute to this work; your agreement with the local authority that she should focus her efforts internally rather than as outreach to other schools is appropriate. This arrangement is currently for at least a term and all parties agree that it should not be reconsidered too quickly, to allow improvements to become embedded.

Governors fully support the drive for high quality teaching and learning. They are increasingly well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses and undertake extensive training. This has improved their capacity to interpret pupil

performance data and challenge underachievement. They are rightly seeking external appraisal of their work by linking with an experienced Chair of Governors from an outstanding school. They receive high quality information from you about the school's performance and are ready to question its impact, characterised by one governor as, 'You've told us, now show us.'

Improvement plans are well-focused on the right priorities and are scrutinised by governors and local authority advisers. However, they do not always spell out clearly enough what success will look like, or word this in terms of pupil learning and progress. This limits governors' ability to ask even more searching questions about specific outcomes.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school benefits from the support of local authority advisers who work well with you to make sure that the priorities for improvement are being tackled with sufficient alacrity. Peer support from a headteacher of an outstanding school has helped you to establish a vision for the school as aspirational and high-achieving.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**