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Mr Russell Leigh
Headteacher
Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School
Queen Street
Wallingford
OX10 7HR

Dear Mr Leigh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 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 September 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 your school improvement plan by including specific dates by which time short term goals (milestones) should be achieved. This will better assist governors in holding the school to account for the rate of improvement
- make monitoring of teaching more specific, such as how effectively do teachers use objectives as starting points in all lessons. This will help teachers focus on key areas for improvement in their teaching.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I had separate meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative of the local authority. During lunchtime, I met briefly with the teachers to talk about actions taken since the last inspection, including training opportunities and their contributions to the school action plan. The action plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2013, a new staff governor has joined the school's governing body. The Early Years Foundation Stage teacher is on maternity leave. Her class is taught by a supply teacher.

Main findings

You are taking a considered and thoughtful approach to improving the quality of teaching. This means that staff welcome your advice. Teachers in Key Stage 2 are being more reflective about their own practice than previously. Where they see gaps in their expertise, they are seeking out ways to address this by, for example, making visits to other schools to learn from colleagues. This is starting to improve their teaching. You have raised your expectations and are making these clear, for instance, such as the suitably high expectations that relate to the presentation of pupils' written work. Teachers, therefore, now expect more from pupils. As a result, pupils tell you that they are trying harder to overcome difficulties with using pens for writing and keeping their pen licence. One pupil commented, 'I'm really working on it.'

The governing body is well informed about the work of the school. Prior to the last inspection, there were fewer opportunities for governors to link with all the teachers who have responsibility for leading specific subjects than there might have been. This is now changing. There are planned activities set with English and mathematics leaders, so that governors can monitor and/or evaluate school improvement closely. Added to this, the governing body has set your performance management targets against the school's journey to good. In turn, you expect teachers, with posts of responsibility, to 'step up to the mark' in contributing to improving teaching. Consequently, the lines of accountability for school improvement are understood by all.

The school improvement plan is comprehensive and sets out a timetable of actions, in order to secure further improvement. However, more clearly defined time scales would help to keep the pace of improvement moving along quickly, as well as helping governors check if actions taken are successful in improving teaching. Some

of the monitoring activities related to teaching are too broad. These would be more effective if broken down into observing the aspect of teaching that the school is currently working on. For example, all teachers setting out an objective to introduce what pupils are learning and how they will need to approach the task. This will also help governors focus their questions of teachers and pupils when monitoring and/or evaluating how well the school is securing improvement to teaching and learning.

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 local authority has supported the school well in putting together the improvement action plan. Alongside this, the local authority has sensibly created a post Ofsted record of action. This plans out week by week what is expected of the school and is a useful tool for keeping an eye on the pace of improvement. The diocese has been involved in supporting the school improvement work. The local authority brokers support from other schools and has delivered training for subject leaders. This has been well received, particularly because the training gave leaders the opportunity to develop lesson observation skills. Consequently, middle leaders are now more informed about what makes a 'good' lesson.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech

Her Majesty's Inspector