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Mr Chris Tomes
Headteacher
Churchmead Church of England (VA) School
Priory Way
Slough
SL3 9JQ

Dear Mr Tomes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Churchmead Church of England (VA) School

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 December 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 section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers set tasks that provide greater challenge and support the less able students to complete these tasks
- make sure that all teachers are explicitly teaching the literacy skills needed for students to succeed in their subjects
- ensure subject leaders are consistent in the rigour with which they hold the teachers they manage to account for students' achievement.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and your middle leaders, a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), who also represents the diocese, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You

accompanied me on brief visits to classes in a range of subjects. I evaluated the school improvement plans.

Context

Since the last inspection, three new subject leaders have been appointed in geography, drama and religious education.

Main findings

You are making the changes that are necessary to improve the school. You and the IEB are holding teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes. You have taken appropriate action where students' progress has been too slow. You are now making sure that everyone implements the changes you have made. You are crystal clear about the extent to which several areas still need improving. However, some of your senior and middle leaders are too generous in their assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The school improvement plans are sharp. They link directly to the areas for improvement in the previous section 5 report. You have rightly included information on students' achievement to measure the success of planned actions. The plans do not indicate in enough detail what governors will do to check the effectiveness of the actions you are taking.

The Chair of the IEB is totally determined to resolve any remaining issues around staffing and recruitment. He is mindful that students who join the school later than usual, in Years 8 to 11 need to achieve highly. To this end he has seen the school at work and used evidence from his visits to challenge leaders to do better. Earlier in the year, he supported the school with relocating Year 11 when the school was closed due to flooding. The Chair has relevant educational experience and understands that the IEB still has a crucial role in improving the school.

In some classes, teachers maintain a good pace and set appropriately challenging tasks. They ask students the type of probing questions that check their learning. This is not as well developed in mathematics and science. Teachers are using the school's marking policy and identifying what students need to do better next time. Some teachers' comments on marked work are very evaluative and detailed, especially in English. However detailed marking is less consistent in mathematics and science. Teachers support students in some lessons by using effective strategies to improve literacy, most noticeably students' understanding of subject-specific words. However, some teachers miss opportunities to use literacy to reinforce learning. For instance, in a chemistry class students were struggling with a matching task. They did not understand of the meaning of the prefixes, 'mono' and 'poly' in the words, 'monomer' and 'polymer' which limited their progress.

Subject leaders are starting to hold the teachers they manage to account for students' progress. Some subject leaders are more robust in the way they do this than others. Many subject leaders are about to undertake training to help them challenge the teachers they manage more effectively. In some subject areas information about student progress is not accurate. I have asked the local authority to support you in moderating the marking in subjects where this is the case.

External Support

The local authority has rightly focused its support on helping teachers to improve their teaching. The local authority now needs to support the school in strengthening the way subject leaders hold teachers to account. The authority also provides some targeted help for students whose first language is not English and for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students. This support has been welcomed by the school. The local authority has been assisting the school in its efforts to support the high number of students who join the school in Years 8 to 11, including through discussions with Slough local authority. Support from representatives of the diocese, other than the Chair of the IEB, has been limited.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the IEB, the Director of Children's Services for Windsor and Maidenhead, the Education Funding Agency and the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard

Her Majesty's Inspector