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8 October 2014

Miss Kathryn Crawford  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School, Banbury  
Southam Road  
Banbury  
OX16 2EG

Dear Miss Crawford

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School, Banbury**

Following my visit to your school on 6 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- get back on track as quickly as possible where there has been some slippage with improvement plans
- strengthen action plans so it is clear what will happen when, what resources are needed and how progress will be checked and impact evaluated
- ensure systems are in place to keep the plans on track in future.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy, two middle leaders, members of the governing body, and representatives of the local authority and diocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We walked around

school together to see the classes at work. I evaluated the school action plans and looked at other key documents.

## **Context**

There has been just one change of teacher since the inspection in July. There is now a permanent teacher in each class. You have recently handed in your resignation.

## **Main findings**

You and your deputy, governors, the local authority and diocese fully accept the findings of the recent inspection. You recognise that although teaching has improved since the previous full inspection it is not consistently good. As a consequence, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Everyone I spoke to was well aware of the need for sustained improvement in the quality of education by the time of the next full inspection. The school is in a stronger position than it has been in the past, to build on recent improvements. Staffing is stable, inadequate teaching is a thing of the past and more teaching is good. The responsibility for improvement no longer lies solely with senior leaders. You now have staff leading on improvements in English and mathematics. You are developing the skills of other staff to enable them take on additional responsibilities.

You and your deputy are clear about what needs to be done to get the school to improve. Your priorities are: making sure that pupils get a better start in early years and make faster progress across the school, rather than relying on boosting achievement in Years 2 and 6; that teaching is consistently good; and that staff are clear what pupils should achieve by the end of the school year. You know that you must intervene more quickly when your tracking systems identify gaps in pupils' learning, and keep a careful check on the success of additional help provided to pupils. Work has begun to tackle these issues. For example, you have taken the opportunity with more stable staffing to move teachers around to make better use of their expertise. I saw from our visits to classes how this is strengthening teaching in early years, particularly in the teaching of early writing skills, and in lower Key Stage 2. However, the pace of change is not always fast enough. Although individual staff receive the support they need, the planned programme to work alongside colleagues to improve teaching has not got off the ground yet. Targets have not yet been set for pupils in all classes. Where there has been significant underachievement in previous years targets are not high enough to bring standards up to average.

The raising attainment plan (RAP) and action plans for English, mathematics and early years are your key working documents. Together they set out what you intend to do to improve teaching and raise achievement. In the main, the actions are appropriate, but the plans are not specific enough in some respects, for example, meeting the needs of more-able pupils. There is a lack of clarity about when things will happen, what they will cost in time or money and who will monitor, or check

that all the things that are planned actually happen. In part, this is why there has already been some slippage this term. It is not always clear how you will measure progress along the way. Mid-year targets are too broad to check accurately how well pupils are doing. I suggested that developing a planner mapping activities across the term might help you and your senior leaders to ensure that the plan stays on track and avoid overload points.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's position and what needs to improve. The Teaching and Learning Committee meets regularly with a clear brief for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, although its role is not explicitly set out in the action plans. Governors hold you and your staff to account for the quality of education and plans for improvement. For example, they ask searching questions about what has been done to avoid dips in pupils' knowledge over the summer holidays and whether targets are ambitious enough. Governors face the additional challenge of appointing a new headteacher; planning for this is at an early stage. Governors are aware of the need to ensure a smooth transition so that the pace of progress at the school does not slow down.

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**

You value the support the school received last academic year from both the local authority, including a local leader of education, and the diocese. It provided you with the additional capacity, much needed at the time, to improve teaching and to support teachers who were just taking on responsibilities for leading subjects. You appreciate the support you are currently receiving from the local authority for your new early years team, not least that it started at the beginning of term. Support from the local authority's and diocese's improvement officers has been slow off the ground this school year. It has been agreed that the local authority school improvement leader will support your plans to improve teaching further, but exactly how, and when, has not been decided. There are no plans to advise or check on the teaching of reading and writing despite it being a key priority. The diocese's role has yet to be agreed. It is crucial that plans are agreed and put in place without further delay.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**