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Alex Wingham
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Dear Mr Wingham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Martin's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 October 2016, 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 November 2015. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- Develop leadership capacity in the school by:
 - extending the responsibilities and influence of those leading phases and subjects
 - extending the impressive work undertaken to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics to other areas of the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the chair of the governing body. I conducted a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and met Brighton and Hove's director of standards and effectiveness at the final feedback meeting. A representative of the Diocese of Chichester also attended the final feedback meeting. You led me on a tour of the school and provided me with a wide range of the school's documentation to scrutinise. We discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I spoke with many pupils informally in lessons, at break and lunchtime. I also examined the school's most recent information about pupils' outcomes data with you and your deputy.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, two members of staff have left the school. Two new teachers joined the school. In September 2016, a part-time deputy headteacher joined St Martin's from a neighbouring partner Church of England school. The school also formed an informal partnership with this school. This arrangement was actively encouraged by the diocese and the local authority. Governors have tried unsuccessfully three times to appoint a substantive headteacher.

Main findings

You continue to provide strong leadership of the school as the acting headteacher. You recognise that over the last year you have acquired and strengthened the skills necessary to lead the school into the next stage of its development. Other leaders have shared the task of improving the school and have done so admirably. You work well as a team. Your ambition and enthusiasm is clear. Staff respond well to your positive approach. Consequently, standards of teaching, behaviour and care have increased considerably across the year. You recognise now, especially with an increasing number of pupils on roll, that it is time to expand the leadership. You are rightly planning to encourage serving teachers to take on phase and subject leadership roles.

St Martin's continues to be a school with a strong sense of its Christian purpose. The attractive, contemporary, artistic 'Stations of the Cross' on the outside wall leading to the school's entrance make this clear straight away. The ethos permeates every aspect of the school's work. Leaders communicate these values effectively. St Martin's has its own unique interpretation of Christian values, relevant to the diverse community it serves. The school's work actively promotes diversity and inclusion, makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and provides many opportunities for pupils to prepare for life in modern Britain. In Year 5, for example, the whole curriculum is delivered through pupils' immersion in the historical context of the second world war. This gives pupils an understanding of recent history and the importance of human rights, justice and

the rule of law. It also provides an outlet for their emerging creativity. The large model Spitfire aircraft suspended from the ceiling is one reminder of pupils' impressive work in art over the last year.

You showed me many ways in which creativity is used in teachers' planning of other parts of the curriculum. Of particular note is the extensive range of activities and techniques developed to support pupils' learning in mathematics. This was necessary because, historically, results had not been good enough. Pupils told me that learning is fun in mathematics. They showed me the games they play to help learn numbers, the way they get number 'facts' at the start of each lesson and the range of 'manipulatives' they are able to use as the lesson develops. They told me that one of the best things about coming to school is mathematics. You showed me that all this work contributed to the much-improved outcomes for pupils in 2016. We agreed that the unvalidated results currently available match your own calculations of the school's performance overall.

Leaders provided me with similarly detailed evidence of the school's work to improve attendance. This has resulted in much-reduced absence. You continue to work effectively at reducing the diminishing number of pupils who are persistently absent from school. Teachers and leaders have made the playground a welcoming place for parents and pupils. This makes a positive start to the day. It also enables you to check the timely arrival of pupils. Levels of lateness have also diminished over the last year. Leaders and the site team have created a secure and attractive learning environment, even though it is surrounded on all sides by industry or housing. Pupils are safe. All pupils enjoy highly stimulating classroom environments. They are happy and want to come to school.

Leaders have made the pastoral care of vulnerable pupils a priority. You manage pupils with potential barriers to learning well. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to supporting the welfare of pupils. They also support teachers well in the classroom. All were seen actively promoting learning and acting as effective team members. As a result of this concerted effort, pupils' conduct around the school and lessons is good. Occasionally pupils do not always take responsibility for their own learning. This means that they drift off task, or let their partners do the work for them, unless the teacher or teaching assistant is challenging them constantly. Most teaching is carefully planned so that pupils progress well through each lesson. The most able pupils are provided with work that stretches them and many respond well. This is helping more of those who were higher attaining in early years to make rapid progress. A few still make choices for less challenging work and are not always prompted to aim higher by the teaching team. Consequently, there is a small proportion of most able, often disadvantaged, pupils whose performance over time does not compare well to other pupils nationally.

Lower- and middle-attaining pupils are supported well to make strong progress. You showed me convincing evidence that pupils enter the nursery at levels below that found typically in three-year-olds. By the end of Reception, a larger proportion of

pupils have attained a good level of development than that found in similar schools. Currently, pupils in key stage 1 perform as well as similar pupils in the phonics check (letters and the sounds they make) and in the end of key stage assessments. This good start to school is working its way up through the year groups as your influence is growing with every year. The large number of disadvantaged pupils are supported to make similarly good progress. Teachers make effective use of a Venn diagram to ensure that each pupils' learning needs are considered. You rightly have the most able pupils as a focus group at the moment.

Teachers responded well to the requirement to improve the feedback they give pupils. All follow the school's assessment policy. I found good examples of teachers' feedback influencing pupils' progress. Most teachers provide learning challenge at three levels. This is generally effective but some pupils need more direction to take on tasks that provide the higher levels of challenge.

Since the inspection, leaders have planned activities to address the areas that were judged to require improvement. You have implemented a robust system for checking the school's performance. This means that you have a detailed understanding of each pupils' progress and how well they are matching up to age-related expectations. This leads to you developing a good understanding of the impact of teaching. Your self-evaluation of the school is, therefore, accurate. You have devised effective tools for this process and these have helped you create a lively and impressive improvement plan.

You have been ably supported by the experienced and knowledgeable chair of the governing body. Governance has strengthened considerably since the inspection. Governors justifiably put in place a revised committee structure in January 2016. This was so that due consideration is given to each area of the Ofsted evaluation schedule. Minutes of governors' meetings show that you are now held securely to account for your leadership of the school and its impact. This is commendable.

External support

You have been skilful in selecting the support you need. You benefit from a local authority and a diocesan director of education keen to support your improvement work. It was encouraging to hear you comment, 'I have been given everything I asked for.' External partners have brokered the right personnel to assist with your improvement activities. You had a change of school partnership adviser in January 2016 and this person has provided well-informed and targeted support for aspects of the school's work. The arrangements you have with your partner school have also proved successful. Teachers are able to share ideas, planning and examples of effective practice regularly. All partners recognise the work you have done and are committed to ensuring that this continues into the future with their help. Recently, the team around the school has decided that less support is needed. This is a tribute to the confidence that all have in your leadership. They rightly judge that your evolving team needs the time and space now to consolidate what has been

achieved, and to focus on those aspects of the school's work which have further room for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester and the director of children's services for Brighton and Hove. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dr Simon Hughes

Her Majesty's Inspector