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1 December 2016

Krys Kuzminska  
Interim Headteacher  
Stoke Mandeville Combined School  
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Stoke Mandeville  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
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Dear Mrs Kuzminska

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stoke Mandeville Combined School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 November 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 February 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- further develop assessment so that leaders and governors know how well pupils are achieving in each subject and there is a sharp focus on progress of the most able
- ensure that the school improvement plan defines the impact that actions should have by key points in time so that its success can be evaluated more precisely.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, the previous interim headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and other leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I

evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other documents, including information on pupils' achievement. We visited lessons to observe the teaching of writing. I looked at provision in the early years with the previous interim headteacher.

## **Context**

The substantive headteacher has been long-term absent since March 2016. An interim headteacher took up post in April for three days a week. When her contract ended in October, you took up the post, also for three days a week. The substantive headteacher is about to resume her role, initially on a part-time basis. Since the inspection, three teachers have left and three have joined, one taking up the new role of leader for key stage 2. The leader for key stage 1 now also leads early years, whereas previously the headteacher had direct oversight of this.

## **Main findings**

You are providing effective leadership for a school that has moved forward notably since the last inspection. The previous interim headteacher took swift and necessary action to ensure that the school functions smoothly. The structures and communication channels needed for this are now in place. Appointments to the newly created roles of key stage 2 and early years leader increased leadership capacity. Reviewed job descriptions, coupled with training, support and the introduction of weekly senior leaders meetings, have all helped to ensure that leaders are clear about their roles and that messages are communicated clearly between leaders and staff. Additionally, your weekly written briefing helps keep all staff and governors up to date.

Effective training and support together with feedback to teachers and next steps for improvement are moving teaching forward. In the lessons we visited, teachers were engaging pupils' interest and the atmosphere was purposeful as pupils reflected on what makes for effective writing. However, although teachers' planning showed that they now consider the differing depth of learning they expect of pupils with different starting points, all pupils had the same criteria for success. As a result, the most able pupils were not as focused on deepening their learning as they could have been.

Leaders are making better use of assessment. Leaders and teachers now have helpful information about the standards that pupils reached in English and mathematics in the summer term and can track the progress made since then. Leaders can see more easily where teaching is weaker and where pupils need support to catch up and act accordingly. Targets are now in place for pupils' future achievement. However, these targets are not a sharp tool for securing good progress for the most able as they do not indicate the proportion of pupils who should be reaching a high standard. Additionally, assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics is at an early stage of development.

The school action plan focuses sharply on tackling the areas for attention identified at the previous inspection. The changes in practice required and the resulting impact these should have on pupils' achievement are clearly defined. However, the steps needed to achieve these changes and the level of impact these should have by key points in time is not consistently clear. This makes it difficult for leaders to evaluate accurately the success of the plan at each review point.

The governing body is increasingly effective. It secured strong leadership to move the school forward during the headteacher's absence. A review of governance undertaken with the support of the local authority has helped identify areas for attention and sharpen the manner in which governors challenge leaders. Governors reflect on the impact of their work and where they can improve. They are making sure that when the headteacher comes back there is a smooth handover and she receives suitable support. You and the previous interim headteacher will be supporting and working alongside her for a while after her return.

### **External support**

Leaders and governors value the wealth of helpful support provided by Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT). Support to secure your services and those of the previous interim headteacher have been key to moving the school forward. The effective impact of work with the leaders of early years and mathematics typifies the quality of the other support the trust has provided. In early years, suitable assessment and records of children's learning are now in place. The mathematics leader has developed her skills in checking the quality of teaching. The BLT consultant who coordinates support ensures that she is abreast of its impact. Monthly 'focus group' meetings with the headteacher help ensure that leadership and external support are effective and key next steps are identified.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**