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Mrs Maria Winter
Headteacher
Datchet St Mary's CofE Primary School
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Dear Mrs Winter

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Datchet St Mary's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 25 November 2014, with Mrs Anne Murray, shadow colleague, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2014. 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 academy should take further action to:

- increase senior leadership capacity by ensuring plans to extend the current leadership arrangement beyond December 2014 are formalised and finalised
- further strengthen the impact of teachers' marking and feedback
- improve pupils' attendance and decrease the rate of persistent absence.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy head teacher, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, a representative from Oxfordshire diocese and a representative from Windsor and Maidenhead local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the academy's improvement plan. In addition, I scrutinised other academy documentation including local authority notes of visit. I joined you on a tour of the academy and visited every year group, taking the opportunity to talk to pupils about their learning.

Context

Since the previous inspection a new temporary, part-time deputy headteacher started in October. The teacher in charge of pupils with special educational needs leaves at the end of term. The Chair of Governors is currently on leave; he will return in January 2015. The Vice-Chair of Governors has 'stepped up' to cover the role of Chair for one term. From Easter 2015, the substantive Chair of Governors will stand down. Local authority advisors from Windsor and Maidenhead Governor Services are currently supporting governors in developing an appropriate and useful structure for the future.

A part-time teacher left at the end of the summer term. Two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) joined in September, with responsibility for a Year 1 and Year 3 class respectively. An additional teacher has also joined in the Nursery class to improve pupil-adult ratios.

Main findings

You, the deputy headteacher and governing body have acted swiftly to address the issues for improvement identified in the recent inspection. The academy's action plan is systematic and priorities are well-matched to the areas requiring improvement. Suitable actions are staggered appropriately over the academic year. The plan makes clear who is responsible for delivering improvements and leaders are making good use of consultants and external support to build capacity and address each key area needing improvement.

Academy leaders have moved quickly to improve the effectiveness of teachers' marking and feedback. A helpful review conducted by the local authority pointed out exactly what needed to improve. Staff participated in helpful training to discuss new approaches; new ways of working were agreed and a new policy adopted. The local authority has adopted this policy as an exemplar. It is clear to see that teachers' marking is improving. All pupils receive clearer prompts showing them how to improve their work. Teachers also encourage pupils to address corrections more routinely. 'Dedicated improvement and reflection time' or 'DIRT' is a key part of the academy day and pupils talk positively about the usefulness of time to improve their

work. However, inconsistency prevails; teachers now need to make more regular checks on the quality of pupils' responses in order to develop their understanding further still.

Leaders have changed the way mathematics is taught; 'Choice and Challenge' activities allow pupils to choose for themselves, work of varying difficulty. Also, pupils are encouraged to make use of the 'learning zone' - an area where the teacher is situated in order to offer additional support. Whilst this works well for some, some pupils do not make use of this additional support when they need to. Consequently, some pupils complete tasks inaccurately as adults do not keep a rigorous enough overview of how well all pupils are learning.

Senior leaders have made noteworthy changes to the teaching of English. Pupils respond well to activities which encourage them to discuss writing and retell stories. In a Reception class, pupils were retelling a story animatedly, successfully using words like colossal and stupendous. Consequently, their vocabulary was developing well. In addition, the academy's approach to teaching phonics has changed; pupils are taught in ability groups and complete activities which are now better matched to their abilities. Also leaders are making more regular checks so they are clearer about how well pupils are learning. Although leaders are more direct about what is expected, some teachers' expectations remain too low; missed opportunities to reinforce pupils' basic skills such as developing a cursive script or spelling known words correctly, are still noticeable.

Senior leaders are steadily improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum. However, their impact on other aspects has been less marked. For example, attendance remains stubbornly below the national average. Although leaders are monitoring patterns and trends, sometimes they are slow to take decisive action. You and governors need to urgently review the academy's attendance policy and ensure that expectations are redoubled and persistent absence tackled more effectively.

Although the Chair of Governors is absent until December, the Vice-Chair has ensured that momentum to improve has been prioritised. A review of governance was completed and governors are keeping a useful overview which summarises their actions to date. For example, priorities are now much clearer and items on meeting agendas are now weighted in terms of importance; this means that the role of the governing body is becoming less operational and helpfully, much more strategic. Governors have recently revised their roles and responsibilities, adjusting their committee structure to align more closely with academy improvement priorities. As a result there are now fewer committees, but those that there are have a clearer remit and wider membership. This means governors have a greater collective knowledge and are carrying out their functions more proficiently. Governors have developed their knowledge and understanding by attending training events and they then cascade their learning to other governors. This is particularly useful as all members

reap the rewards of the training of one or two. The governors acted swiftly to expand the leadership team by appointing a temporary, part-time deputy headteacher. However plans beyond December 2014 have not been finalised; this is now a matter of urgency.

HMI may provide further support and challenge to the academy before its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority and diocese are providing helpful guidance to all members of the academy community including governors, senior leaders and teachers. A comprehensive support package is in place which makes good use of a wide support network brokered from several different schools. This is further enhanced by the regular and frequent visits from the academy's nominated local authority advisor. The local authority has a clear view of which support will be most useful to leaders. For example, senior leaders have received beneficial support from a Local Leader of Education (LLE) from Penwood Primary School. The local authority has also instigated helpful visits for teachers to observe an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) at St Edmund Campion Catholic Primary School.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr

Her Majesty's Inspector