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10 November 2011

Miss M Long  
Headteacher  
Kirkham St Michael's Church of England Primary School  
School Lane  
Kirkham  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR4 2SL

Dear Miss Long

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Kirkham St Michael's Church of England Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 November 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the parents, pupils, members of the governing body and the representatives of the local authority who gave up their time, at short notice, to talk to me during the inspection.

The deputy headteacher and a senior post holder were on long-term leave of absence at the time of the inspection. Their positions are being covered by experienced staff from other schools, in arrangements brokered by the local authority.

As a result of the inspection on 24 March 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The results of the school's end of Key Stage 2 tests and assessments in 2011 confirmed the findings of the March inspection: that the progress of too many pupils was inadequate. Standards in English and mathematics were low, especially so in mathematics. There had been too little time to close the gaps in knowledge and understanding for pupils within their final year. In partial mitigation of the low attainment, this particular year had a large proportion of pupils, mainly boys, who found learning difficult. The year was quite unrepresentative of other cohorts passing up the school.

The current situation is much improved. In each year group, a high proportion of pupils, over 90%, are on track to make the expected two National Curriculum levels progress from

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Year 2 to Year 6 in the core subjects of English and mathematics. There are occasional shortfalls, such as in mathematics in the current Year 6. Shortfalls in progress are generally caused by gaps in knowledge and understanding from previous years. Teachers are working effectively to identify and remedy these gaps and there is time, even at Year 6, for pupils to possibly make up much of the lost ground.

Observations of lessons and an examination of pupils' exercise books confirm the school's analysis of improved progress. Generally, pupils' writing is now of a better quality and has been extended to subjects other than English, such as in science and in topics. In mathematics, there is a much clearer focus on understanding and applying new learning in different situations. All groups of pupils are making better progress; there is little evidence of less progress among more-able pupils, or among pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, noted in the March inspection report. Pupils reported that lessons were more challenging and interesting. Their behaviour is improved. It was good in lessons observed and pupils had confidence that teachers would support them whenever needed. The picture of improved progress across the school is not entirely consistent. However, the school's senior leaders are aware of where better progress is required and they are working effectively to improve matters in these classes.

The balance of teaching quality has improved. It was satisfactory in March. During the inspection, the overall quality of teaching observed was good, and this finding is in agreement with the current evaluations by the school and the local authority. Staff have learned much from consultant support provided by the local authority. Lessons observed were well planned and challenging for pupils of all abilities. Teachers had high expectations of pupils' learning and encouraged pupils to talk together and share ideas. Both of these aspects of good teaching were in short supply when the school was last inspected. Marking of pupils' work shows particular improvement, with clear evaluations of what pupils have learned and helpful pointers to what to do next.

The significant staffing instability noted in the March inspection report has continued. The absence of key senior staff is recognised by the school, the governing body and the local authority as a potential barrier that threatens the school's progress. Past turbulence in staffing has proved the major concern of parents and of pupils, who are otherwise highly supportive of the school. The local authority has intervened effectively in seconding experienced teachers to support the headteacher. These teachers are making a highly positive difference to teaching, learning and to the processes of leadership and management generally. Arrangements to provide a smooth transition as senior staff return to their posts and seconded staff return to their schools are in place. However, the governing body is, rightly, anxious to oversee the effectiveness of the arrangements to ensure the momentum for improvement is not lost. There has been a clear improvement in the quality of leadership of the school to date, continuing that recognised in the March inspection report. The work of the teachers and the learning of pupils are now monitored much more rigorously. The governing body has new members bringing new skills to bear and, although this cannot be seen in its minutes, the governing body is providing much greater challenge in addition to its continuing support for the school. There is work yet to do that is fully recognised by leaders.

For example, the in-school leadership for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is not securely established, although external consultants currently provide quality support. Communication with parents and the community is improving. This is important, as parents were understandably concerned when the school was given a notice to improve.

The package of help provided by the local authority is proving effective. Staff are appreciative of the input made by consultants, to the extent that teachers are now secure in their practice and confident enough to share their ideas with other schools. Challenge and support for the headteacher have proved responsive to need. The local authority's plans to support the school are of good quality.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Padgett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011**

- Raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, particularly in writing and mathematics by:
  - providing more challenging work, especially for more-able pupils
  - improving pupils' application of mathematical skills to problem solving and investigational work
  - encouraging pupils to write at greater length
  - ensuring that planning is focused on improving basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress so that it is consistently good or better by:
  - ensuring greater consistency of challenge and aspiration across the school
  - providing pupils with more opportunities to work independently and to become more self-reliant
  - ensuring that work planned is carefully matched to the abilities and interests of all pupils and takes account of their previous learning.