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20 September 2013

Mrs Alison Howarth  
Headteacher  
Darwen St Barnabas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Knowsley Road  
Darwen  
Lancashire  
BB3 2JA

Dear Mrs Howarth

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Darwen St Barnabas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen**

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- audit the quality of teaching to identify strengths and weaknesses across the school and ensure teachers receive clear direction about what is expected from them
- review the teaching and learning policy so all teachers know the fundamental principles that underpin good and better teaching at St Barnabas
- enable teachers visit schools with excellent practice so they are able to learn from the best
- provide greater support for the Early Years Foundation Stage leader to quickly bring about improvements in the use of the outdoor area
- ensure the governing body take responsibility for planning their own course of actions to enable them to improve their effectiveness.

## **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, senior leaders and managers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and school data, including the unvalidated Key Stage 2 results were scrutinised. Minutes from governing body meetings and the school's monitoring records were also considered. We visited each classroom to observe pupils at work. I also met with a small group of pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

## **Context**

Since the June inspection, three teachers have left the school. Three new teachers took up post in September 2013. The Year 2 teacher has returned to school following a period of extended leave. The headteacher has reduced her working time to three days a week as part of a phased retirement plan. The deputy headteacher acts as headteacher on the two remaining days.

## **Main findings**

You have been busy since the inspection and have made positive strides in tackling some of the weaknesses identified in the inspection report. However, not all of your work has been effective enough to make a real difference to the quality of teaching. Improving teaching is not at the heart of your planned actions. Although there have been opportunities for staff training and for some teachers to visit different schools, this is not getting to the root of the problem. Not enough time has been set aside to review the teaching and learning policy and to agree the fundamental principles which will underpin good or better teaching at St Barnabas.

Time has been spent on introducing published schemes to help teachers plan lessons. However, not enough attention has been given to honing teachers' skills and subject knowledge so they can plan activities which meet the needs of all pupils in their class. Not all teachers have been formally observed since the beginning of the term. This means you have not gained an up-to-date understanding of current strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

Despite this shortcoming, it is clear that you have not stood still since the inspection. You are using information about pupils' achievement to set ambitious targets for every year group. Thoughtful actions to develop the role of subject leaders means this group of staff are re-invigorated and keen to get on with the job. Immediate action to improve the curriculum has been successful in giving pupils more time to read and write outside of the published scheme. The 2013 unvalidated test results show some of your actions are beginning to bear fruit. Many more Year 6 pupils reached the levels expected for their age than in previous years.

Progress in improving outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is too slow. Although new floor markings have been added during the summer break, the range of outside activities is limited. As a result, no children opted to work outside of the classroom during the time the inspector visited this area.

The governing body continue to check on the work of the school through a special committee which was set up before the recent inspection. As a result, they know where you have been successful and the issues that still need to be tackled. They are beginning to find out more about the school for themselves by visiting classrooms and reviewing school data. However, they do not systematically report back on their findings so all of the governing body have an up-to-date view on the school's progress. They have not considered the actions they need to take to develop their own effectiveness further.

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 and the governing body value the challenge and expertise of the School Improvement Officer who has helped you hone your skills in judging teaching and supported governors in getting to grips with national data. The local authority has also been proactive in linking you to a local school to learn from good practice. This has been very helpful in developing essential management systems. However, this link is not being exploited fully to improve teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Blackburn with Darwen and the Director of Blackburn Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**