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12 November 2013

Mrs Victoria Weddle  
Headteacher  
Darwen St Peter's Church of England Primary School  
Turncroft Road  
Darwen  
Lancashire  
BB3 2BW

Dear Mrs Weddle

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Darwen St Peter's Church of England Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen**

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. 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 school should take further action to:

- further improve the quality of teaching by sharing good practice within the school and providing training for specific aspects of teachers' practice
- ensure all teachers use the information on pupils' progress when planning activities for all groups of pupils
- extend opportunities for parents to be involved in, and understand, the work of the school.

**Evidence**

During the visit I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. You gave me a tour of the school and we visited a few lessons. We reviewed the school improvement plan, pupils' progress information and sampled a few pupils' workbooks to check on progress.

## Context

Since my visit in December the headteacher has left the school and you took over the role of acting headteacher from June 2013. Three teachers are acting as assistant headteachers. One teacher has left the school and the Reception teacher has returned from maternity leave. A new teacher has joined the school into Year 4. Other changes include: the Year 6 teacher moving to Year 3; the Year 5/6 teacher moving into a Year 6 class; the creation of a mixed Year 1/2 class; and the appointment of two new teaching assistants.

## Main findings

Since my visit in December the school has experienced some staff instability. However, you, governors and staff have responded with gusto and commitment to improve the schools' performance. You recognise that improvements must be made and are working swiftly to affect these changes. In a short space of time you and the governors reviewed the school improvement plan so that it strictly guides the work of all involved. Planned action links to the affect it will have on pupils' achievement and key review points allow a transparent check on the success of this action. As a result, you have set a clear vision for the school's future and raised expectations for staff and pupils. Teachers' targets for their performance are linked to the improvement plan so that they are answerable to you for the progress the pupils in their class make. You have moved teachers to different classes to strengthen teaching by matching their strengths to the needs of classes. You have done the same with teaching assistants. But you have recognised where teachers need more training and have organised action to support those staff. All teachers have had the opportunity to observe outstanding teaching at a local school and several are attending external training, for example on developing boys' writing. You are using the strength within the school to guide and coach other teachers. You have already seen an improvement through this work. Teachers are using the new assessment and tracking system to better match activities to pupils' needs and abilities; this was evident in the Year 6 class mathematics lesson I sampled.

Results of the Key Stage 1 assessments for 2013 improved overall to broadly average. You were disappointed, but not surprised, that the results for Year 6 in 2013 declined from those in 2012. Despite this, the information you have collected on pupil progress for this term shows that you expect results to be much better for Year 2 and Year 6 for 2014. If these results are to be realised it is essential that pupils make swift progress across all classes. The sample of books we looked at shows that pupils are productive across writing, mathematics and other subjects. Presentation in a few books was neat with clear handwriting; marking gave useful advice on how to improve. However, there is still some way to go before the school can confidently state that guidance is precise enough for all pupils.

Governors have taken some hard decisions and have not shied away from taking action when it was needed. Governors' committees have been revised so that the chair of each committee has increased responsibility for the work and finance of that committee. In this way decisions can be taken more swiftly so that the school can make progress. Governors have insisted that senior leaders present them with pupil progress information which can be checked from term to term; for each pupil and for groups. A member of the senior leadership team must report to governors about an action from the previous meeting. Governors are relying less on senior leaders for information about the school and are increasingly finding out for themselves, for example, through more regular visits to school and through being linked to a particular class. They have plans to involve parents more in the life of the school.

Through your calm, well-organised approach to the challenges faced by the school you have won the trust and enthusiasm of all involved. The school is now at a critical point in its improvement journey as governors appoint a new headteacher to lead the school forward. It is essential that the revised assessment and tracking system is used rigorously to check that all groups of pupils are on course for the high targets you have set.

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**

The local authority has supported the school in writing the improvement plan and organised a link with an outstanding school. The local authority officer has conducted paired lesson observations with the headteacher. Time has been given to support the governors in the recruitment process of the new headteacher. To promote more accountability and organise any additional support needed by the school, a meeting has been held between the Chair of Governors, the Diocesan representative, the Director of Children's Services and the local authority officer.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

**Her Majesty's Inspector**