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11 December 2013

Mrs Ellie Lorenzo  
Headteacher  
Emmanuel Holcombe Church of England Primary School  
Helmshore Road  
Holcombe  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mrs Lorenzo

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Emmanuel Holcombe Church of England Primary School, Bury**

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 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 September 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:

- ensure teachers use assessment information to plan activities which match the varying needs of pupils in their class
- use the evidence in pupils' books and school data alongside your findings from classroom observations to gain an accurate view of teaching on a day-to-day basis
- ensure the feedback teachers receive on their performance is precise and helps them to improve
- develop your analysis of data to keep a check on the progress of different groups of pupils from their various starting points so any gaps are identified early and tackled swiftly
- with the support of the local authority, commission an external review of the governing body, so governors have an accurate understanding of their current effectiveness, can identify their development needs and plan training accordingly

- review the action plan to ensure there are clear planned actions for governors to help them improve their effectiveness in holding leaders to account.

## **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself and the deputy headteacher, three members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. School data, including the unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised. Your checks on teaching were also considered. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I also met with a small group of older pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

## **Context**

There have been no significant changes to the school's context since the September inspection.

## **Main findings**

There is no doubt that you, the staff and the governing body accept the outcome from the recent inspection was accurate. Everyone is keen to improve, so there is a common sense of purpose and no significant barriers to halt your improvement journey.

No-one has stood still since the inspection. However, despite being very busy, not all of your actions have been effective. This is because your work is not making a big enough difference to improving teaching and helping pupils to make better progress than they have in the past. Your view of teaching is too generous because it relies too much on what you see in the classrooms. Not enough attention is given to the evidence in pupils' books or your own progress data to draw conclusions on what teaching is typically like on a day-to-day basis. This means teachers and governors do not have a realistic understanding of teaching across the school. You check teaching often, but the feedback teachers receive on the quality of their work lacks precision. As a result, targets for improvement are not helping all teachers develop their teaching techniques quickly enough.

Pupils' books show teachers do not use assessment information well enough to identify what each pupil needs to do to reach their individual goals. Too many pupils do the same task regardless of whether they are more-able or they struggle with their learning. This is the crux of the matter for your school. Not matching pupils' tasks to their different needs is the key reason pupils are not making greater gains in their learning. Teachers are all following the revised marking policy with varied success. Some teachers are beginning to pinpoint what pupils need to do to improve their learning. However, too much emphasis is given to commenting on how neatly or quickly pupils complete tasks rather than providing clear guidance to move pupils' learning forward. Not all pupils are expected to write enough and the progress of some pupils is hampered by an overuse of worksheets.

Although it is early days since the inspection, your data show most pupils are making expected progress. There are some green shoots, for example, the current Year 6 are flying in their reading and writing skills; they have already made the amount of progress normally expected by the end of the year. However, this rapid improvement is not reflected in all classes and pupils' achievement in mathematics continues to lag behind.

You have improved your use of data so you can keep a closer check on pupils' progress. A key strength is the work you have completed to lift aspirations by making sure teachers are in no doubt about the accelerated progress every pupil needs to make to reach your challenging targets. Nonetheless, you are not yet digging into the data deeply enough to identify how different groups of pupils are progressing from their various starting points.

Although there is work to do to ensure the school is good by the next inspection, some of your actions are bearing fruit. The systems for checking on teaching and holding teachers to account for the progress pupils make have been reviewed and tightened up so they happen far more frequently. The introduction of 'Challenge Fridays' mean pupils have greater opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems. Pupils are full of praise for you and their teachers; they say the school is getting better and they have to work much harder than in the past. They appreciate greater opportunities to talk to their partner before they have to put pen to paper as this helps them think more deeply about their writing. Your action plan reflects your determination to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and there are a range of appropriate activities planned to lift the quality of teaching.

The governing body share your eagerness to succeed. They are determined the criticisms levelled at them will have been tackled and resolved by the next inspection. Nonetheless, there are no planned actions in your action plan to help them achieve this goal. They have already set up a special committee to keep a closer check on pupils' achievement. However, they have been slower to gain an overview of the school's performance compared to others across the country. They are beginning to visit school more frequently to gather their own first-hand evidence but this is in the early stages of development. Governors are keen to move forward. As a result, they welcome the opportunity to participate in an external review of governance.

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 are very willing to listen to and act upon advice which means you welcome the support provided by the local authority. This is beginning to make a difference in some areas of the school, for example, support provided by a local authority officer means the actions to improve teaching are fit-for-purpose. A variety of links have been established with local schools to help you improve the quality of writing and mathematics teaching and to help governors identify their next steps. A recent book scrutiny, completed by a local authority consultant, has provided you with a crystal

clear analysis of teaching and learning in writing with excellent recommendations to help you tackle this area successfully. You are using the help available from the Diocese to support the governing body in improving their effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**