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23 October 2014

Mrs Christine Duckworth  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Balderstone  
Oldham Road  
Rochdale  
Lancashire  
OL11 2HB

Dear Dear Mrs Duckworth

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Balderstone, Rochdale**

Following my visit with Julie Yarwood, HMI, to your school on 22 October 2014, 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 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 May 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 last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply enough focused on rapidly bringing about improvement; the school should take immediate action to:

- secure at least consistently good teaching across the school, by ensuring that teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able
- raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in order to accelerate the progress that all groups of pupils make, particularly in reading and mathematics. Ensure that achievement in these subjects matches, at least, national averages
- make sure that pupils' targets are expressed in language that they can understand, in order to give them greater ownership of their learning goals and enable them to gauge their rate of progress
- bring all marking in the school up to the standard of the best so that it has maximum impact on pupils' progress

- ensure that senior leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching gives greater emphasis to the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning
- refine the school development plan so that the improvement priorities are in an order of importance and have clear time scales, providing senior leaders with a framework to manage change effectively
- ensure governors are given timely and sharply focussed information on the school's performance to enable them to provide sufficient challenge to senior leaders, holding them robustly to account for the standards achieved by the pupils.

## **Evidence**

During this visit I met with you and other members of the senior leadership team, a representative of the local authority, two members of the governing body and a group of polite, well mannered and enthusiastic pupils eager to share their views. You accompanied my colleague and I on a tour of the school, where we had the opportunity of observing the pupils and their teachers at work. I scrutinised the work in a range of pupils' books. This activity enabled me to evaluate the quality of teachers' marking and how well the activities that pupils are given to do meet their needs. I also examined a number of documents including the recently revised school development plan, pupils' attainment and progress data, senior leaders' records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and the single central record of the checks made on the suitability of adults to work with children. I also read the local authority's most recent report of their review of the school.

## **Context**

You and your colleagues have had to manage a number of changes to the teaching staff since my previous visit. The deputy headteacher's position has been occupied by three different teachers and will be filled permanently at the start of the spring term. A teacher left the school at the end of the summer term and two teachers joined the staff in September. As a consequence, you have reviewed the way staff are deployed at Key Stage 2 and you have moved some class teachers to different year groups. The new appointments have enabled you to strengthen the provision for extra-curricular music and modern foreign languages.

## **Main findings**

Results at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2014 were very disappointing. At KS1 attainment at the higher levels declined in reading and writing compared to the previous year and pupils' performance on both measures was below 2013 national averages. At Key Stage 2 the picture is more mixed with welcome improvements in attainment on the English grammar, spelling and punctuation test and in writing. However, attainment and progress in reading remained at the well below average levels seen in 2013 and there was a decline in mathematics. With an 18 percentage point fall in the proportion of pupils making the progress expected of them. These

results are particularly concerning in light of the fact that in 2014 the cohort of pupils who achieved these results were of above average capability when they started Key Stage 2.

Although staff changes may have been a contributory factor in the weaker performance of pupils in 2014, the work in pupils' books is indicating that this degree of under performance persists. In the sample of Key Stage 2 books examined I saw numerous examples where teachers had given pupils exactly the same activity and this activity often lacked challenge for more able pupils. Consequently, they found the work too easy, did not have to think hard about what they were doing and as a result opportunities to deepen their understanding were missed. The demonstrable impact of teachers' low expectations of what pupils can achieve is seen in pupils' results.

Teachers are working hard to implement the school's marking policy and evidence from the work scrutiny shows that pupils' work is regularly reviewed. However, the quality of teachers' marking lacks consistency. In the best examples, teachers' comments are supportive, providing pupils with constructive advice on how a piece of work can be improved, which pupils then act on. However, some teachers' comments lack this level of precision and as a result pupils' responses, when they make them, can be superficial and have little impact on moving their learning forward. There are also examples of errors in pupils' work being repeated and sometimes reinforced. This is certainly the case when teachers do not correct pupils' spelling mistakes. The work scrutiny also revealed that for older pupils the assessment of writing places too much emphasis on its structure. There is not enough emphasis on encouraging pupils to use their imaginations or utilise an increasing range of vocabulary to make their writing lively. This increased level of sophistication is required at the higher levels.

Since September you have changed the way pupils' targets are set. Pupils have end of year targets in each of their core subjects and you and your colleagues are clear as to the progress each child is expected to make in that time. However, although the pupils I spoke with know what their targets are, they are not sure how these relate to the work they are doing or for that matter what they need to do to exceed them and accelerate their progress. This lack of clarity is hampering their ability to take ownership of their learning.

As required by statutory regulations senior leaders have carried out the requisite checks on those staff new to the school to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Senior leaders and governors are under no illusions that standards in the school are not high enough and pupils' progress needs to accelerate if they are to achieve at the level of which they are capable. Senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing is too generous and their view of the school's progress since the previous inspection is not consistent with the findings of this visit. Consequently, they have

not identified weaknesses quickly enough or taken action to address them with sufficient alacrity.

You and your colleagues have introduced a raft of changes, this term, in a further attempt to iron out inconsistencies and drive up standards. However, for many of these initiatives it is too early to assess their impact.

Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and they use a range of evidence to determine the impact of teaching over time, by evaluating teachers' planning, using observations of lessons and undertaking work scrutinies. However, the school's records show that senior leaders place too great an emphasis on the assessment of teachers' skills rather than the impact of teachers' practice on pupils' learning.

Subsequent to my previous visit, the review of governance recommended in the inspection report was completed. As a result the governing body has been restructured and the committee structure rationalised leading to governors having a much greater focus on school improvement and a better understanding of the overall effectiveness of the school. However, they are aware that their ability to hold the school to account can sometimes be hampered by the lack of timely and clear information about the school's performance provided to them from senior leaders.

Changes to the school development plan, recommended at the last HMI visit, have been made. The plan is now more succinct and identifies the school's development priorities and the actions to be taken to improve the school. However, it is not clear what the order of these development priorities are, or more importantly, what needs to be done first in order to maximise pupils' progress.

In view of the concerns expressed in this letter, I will make arrangements to return to the school to meet with the full governing body.

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 are continuing to provide intensive support to the school in order to boost senior leadership capacity and assist them in implementing the school's development plan. For example they have brokered a link with a local successful primary school with the headteacher of that school providing in-depth support to the senior leaders of St. Mary's. Although this partnership has only been in place for a relatively short period it is already beginning to show signs of impact. With senior leaders having their awareness raised about the impact of a culture of low expectations and the need for greater urgency in the actions that need to be taken to improve the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

**Her Majesty's Inspector**