

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



5 December 2016

Vicky Brown  
Avondale Primary School  
Durham Road  
Darwen  
Lancashire  
BB3 1NN

Dear Mrs Brown

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Avondale Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 2016, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- review the school improvement plan so that planned action has the maximum impact on pupils' progress
- make sure that planned action is balanced across an appropriate timescale so that leaders and governors can celebrate success and take action on any slippage
- make sure that pupils, including those most able and those disadvantaged, make accelerated progress so that they can reach higher standards.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your senior leadership team to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I met with three members of the governing body and nine middle leaders. I met with two representatives from the local authority and spoke with an officer from a neighbouring local authority on the telephone. I spoke with a group of 11 Year 6 pupils to gain their views on the school. You accompanied me on a tour of the classrooms to observe pupils at work. I looked at a few pupils' workbooks and the display of work around the school. I evaluated the school's improvement plan, records relating to pupils' achievement and your checks on the quality of teaching, and looked at the minutes from governing body meetings.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection there have been several changes in the school. The previous headteacher has left the school and you have taken up the role as headteacher. Two teachers have left the school and four new ones have joined. Four governors have left the governing body and four have joined. There are three more vacancies on the governing body and the chair of the governing body is recruiting to these roles.

## **Main findings**

The findings from the November 2015 inspection were a shock to the whole school community. As a result, several staff, including the headteacher, chose to leave the school. Additionally, four members of the governing body resigned from their roles. Action taken to appoint temporary staff led to a period of instability within the school; staff morale was low and limited progress took place. However, the governors and the headteacher wrote an action plan which would guide the school in its improvement; this was moderated by the local authority. Governors took action to recruit a new headteacher to lead the school from September 2016 and successfully appointed a dynamic, enthusiastic individual.

Since your appointment, you have spurred the whole school community on. You have set a very clear vision for improvement which is reflected in senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff. All have an uncompromising desire to provide the very best education and care for the pupils of Avondale. You speedily introduced essential processes and procedures in order for you, your senior leaders and governors to check the progress of the school towards good. This means that you all know the strengths of the school and take action to remedy the weaknesses. The staff met me with smiles during my visit which reflects the raised morale. Parents I spoke with were equally satisfied with the decisions you have made; for example, by changing the timings of playtime, lunchtime and assemblies you have gained an extra two hours in learning time for your pupils. Similarly, parents are very satisfied

that their children can enter school earlier in the morning so be ready to start work immediately.

Through the external reviews of governors and the use of the pupil premium, governors are in a much stronger position to hold leaders to account for the smooth running of the school. The reviews instigated professional discussion about the roles and responsibilities of governors so that each member knows what is expected of them. All took part in an audit to identify their skills and identify those needed to enable governors to rigorously monitor the school. As a result, the four new governors appointed have brought expertise in special educational needs, sport, premises and pastoral provision to strengthen governance at Avondale. Members use their action plan to guide their work so that they work as a corporate body for the good of the pupils. Minutes of governing body meetings show that leaders provide an array of information in an appropriate style and that governors challenge this information with shrewd questions. In this way, the governing body keeps a keen eye on the decisions that senior leaders take and checks that the best interests of pupils are paramount. Each governor is linked to a subject leader. Regular meetings mean that governors know about current developments in their subject or aspect and can confidently report back to the full governing body. This includes a governor meeting with the teacher newly appointed as pupil premium champion. This means that governors are much clearer about the achievements of disadvantaged pupils.

Governors have taken stringent action to make sure that pupils are safe. The safeguarding policy is up to date and reflects current statutory requirements. Pupils who spoke to me said that they feel safe and that the school keeps them safe.

Minor omissions from the website were rectified before the end of the inspection.

You and senior leaders have placed the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment at the centre of improvements. You have used the expertise from the teaching school and internal strengths to improve practice in key stage 2. You have led professional training for staff in mathematics, spelling, and grammar so that they feel more confident in the approaches they use in class. Teachers have visited other schools to observe strong classroom practice. As a result, you know the strengths of each staff member and take action to support them so that they improve practice. You check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through lesson observations, scrutinising pupils' workbooks, holding pupil progress meetings and checking on progress information. These methods enable you to challenge classroom practice and provide professional development activities which are pertinent to the needs of the staff. Your records show that the quality of teaching is improving.

You have set high expectations for staff and pupils. Through detailed guidelines, you have made it plain to staff what action they need to take to ensure consistency

throughout the school. This means that pupils know what to expect and do not waste time relearning procedures in each class. One pupil commented on how she regularly uses the aids to learning to help her improve her work during fix-it time. This gives pupils confidence and independence in improving their work. Pupils' work is tastefully displayed around the school so that pupils see the value of effort.

During my visit, I observed well-behaved pupils who were engaged and interested in their learning. Pupils say they have chances to use reasoning skills in their mathematics work and write at length across other subjects. They consider that the work is interesting, challenging and fun.

Results of the 2016 tests and assessments show a mixed picture of achievement. Results for pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 cannot be compared to previous years due to the change in the method of testing. Children in the early years did well, attaining standards in line with other children of a similar age. Pupils in Year 1 reached above-average levels in the phonics screening check. Similarly, results for Year 2 showed that the numbers reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics were above the national average. However, the numbers reaching above expected levels still need to improve.

However, results were not so rosy for children who left Year 6. Higher than average proportions of pupils gained the expected standard in mathematics, which reflects the emphasis on this subject. However, lower than average proportions of pupils reached the expected or higher standards in reading, writing, and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Swift analyses of these results have led to action to remedy these weaknesses. Daily lessons in grammar and punctuation are helping pupils to develop basic skills for writing; regular lessons are supporting pupils in building up knowledge and techniques in spelling. Chances to write in other subjects give pupils time to write creatively and at length. Displays of pupils' writing are testimony to the whole-school focus on this subject as the samples reflect progress through the school. In this way, pupils and staff know what is expected.

These improvements bode well for the future achievements of pupils. The school's own tracking data shows that pupils in Year 6 are on track to achieve higher standards next year.

Middle leadership is a developing strength of the school. Several middle leaders have attended training specifically on the role and responsibilities of middle leadership. Through coaching activities from senior leaders and from a neighbouring local authority officer, they have quickly built competence in observing lessons, scrutinising pupils' work and contributing to pupil progress meetings. As the use of the newly introduced tracking system gathers momentum, plans are in place for middle leaders to analyse pupil progress information so that they can fully contribute to the improvements across all subjects and aspects.

Strengths and weaknesses of the school are clear to you, your staff and governors. Action taken so far has enabled rapid improvements in the leadership and management of the school. However, you know that there is still work to be done to make sure that pupils, including those most able and those disadvantaged, make rapid progress. It is timely to review your plan to make sure that all planned action is linked directly to what will change for pupils. Additionally, the current plan is based mainly on one term and action needs to be spaced out across a longer timeline to ensure that robust checking takes place.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has supported you by providing training for governors and by organising a headteacher mentor for you. Support from the training school and a neighbouring local authority has helped middle leaders in developing the skills they need to carry out their roles effectively. You have used this external support to make sure that the school receives guidance and training in the most pressing areas.

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  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**