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25 June 2014

Mr Dominic James  
Headteacher  
St Stephen's Tockholes CofE Primary School  
Rock Lane  
Tockholes  
Darwen  
Lancashire  
BB3 0LX

Dear Mr James

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Stephen's Tockholes CofE Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen**

Following my visit to the school on 24 June 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2014. 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 focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- commission an external review of the effectiveness of the governing body, its committee structures and how well it meets its statutory obligations
- rewrite the improvement plan so that it is sharply focussed on planning a route for the school to be judged as good at its next inspection; so that it prioritises improvements to leadership and governance; and so that it identifies clear criteria to judge the success and impact of actions taken to raise achievement.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, I held a meeting with you to look at improvements made since the inspection. I looked through a few pupils' books and observed a part of

break time. I met with two representatives from the local authority and one from the diocese. I also met with five members of the governing body. I looked through the school's improvement plan and a list of events that had taken place since the inspection. I took into account the written views of a member of staff and a written report by the local authority following a full review of the school.

## **Context**

Since the inspection a new teaching assistant started the school and a temporary part-time teacher was appointed to be a permanent member of staff from September 2014.

## **Main findings**

There have been some improvements since the inspection. A focussed scrutiny of pupils' work carried out by senior leaders, shows that the new handwriting policy, coupled with training for staff, has resulted in improved presentation in pupils' books. Looking through pupils' work I noted that since Easter, pupils are now writing in joined-up handwriting with greater neatness and uniformity in the height and depth in their letters. Teachers' marking has improved. There are now some opportunities for pupils to respond to and improve their work as a result of feedback. The headteacher has also improved the tracking of pupils' assessments which in turn has led to greater accuracy in self-evaluation.

The Chair of the Governing Body has observed the headteacher looking through pupils' work to check on its quality. As a result, the governors' oversight of the quality of the school's work has started slowly to improve.

Despite these improvements I identified that the current constitution of the Governing Body does not comply with statutory requirements which state that no-one who is employed at the school, as a teacher or as any other member of the school's staff, is eligible to be Chair or Vice-Chair; presently this role is held by a member of staff. Additionally the local authority has identified possible irregularities with the appointment of staff and is taking action to resolve this situation. Consequently, I recommend an external review of governance to ensure members can carry out their roles effectively and meet their statutory duties.

The school's improvement plan is weak:

- it does not plot a clear path to becoming good at the next inspection
- the criteria used to measure whether the actions to improve have had an impact are too imprecise
- the timescale for implementing the actions are inappropriate and unrealistic, for example, most of the action are due to all take place in the summer term
- there are too many priorities and too many actions which means the plan lacks focus

- the actions to improve leadership, including governance, are too imprecise and often just repeat comments in the Ofsted report rather than making crystal clear what should be improved and how.

I plan to monitor the school through future visits and through telephone conversations with school staff before its next full Ofsted inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided intensive challenge and support. The headteacher volunteered the school to be part of a support programme more than a year ago. Since then there have been frequent visits and contact. The school is linked with St Thomas' Primary School in the authority and has worked with other schools such as Belmont Primary and Abbey Village Primary in Lancashire. The impact, according to the local authority has been an improvement in teaching in Key Stage 2. The local authority has concerns about the quality of leadership and governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

**Her Majesty's Inspector**