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Mrs Helen Hesketh
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Dear Mrs Hesketh

Short inspection of Calder Vale St John Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong leadership provides clear direction for the school. Your management of the significant changes to the teaching staff that have occurred since the last inspection has been careful and well thought out, ensuring that disruptions to improvement have been minimised. You seize opportunities for development and use them effectively to improve the school. As a result, the quality of education that pupils receive continues to improve. The governors and staff share your high ambitions and together you have been rigorous in tackling the two areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

To accelerate the progress pupils make in writing, you have taken well-judged and effective actions. You have capitalised on opportunities for the schools you lead to collaborate; the subject leader for English has provided training and support that ensures teachers and teaching assistants have appropriate skills in the teaching of writing. Teachers' effective use of new technologies and other opportunities, including participation in writing workshops with a local secondary school, enhance pupils' skills and provide additional challenge for the most able at the right level. Teachers use the local outdoor environment exceptionally well to provide exciting stimuli and opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills across a range of subjects. These included, for example, 'stone age bone age day' where pupils built a settlement of shelters in the school's woodland and spent the day living as ancient villagers. Your sharply focused monitoring and accurate evaluation of the impact of

these actions shows they have been positive throughout the school and that pupils now make stronger progress in writing. However, you recognise that pupils' accuracy in their use of English grammar and spelling is sometimes not sufficiently strong to enable them to reach the highest standards.

Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. You have carefully managed recruitment to ensure that you appoint staff with the necessary skills required by your very small school. This drive to ensure the best quality teaching in the long term has led to short periods where temporary staff provide cover. During this time, you recognise that the pace of improvement slowed in key stage 2, particularly in pupils' development and their application of spelling and grammar skills across the curriculum. However, your careful monitoring and effective actions, including the regular teaching of some English lessons, ensured that any negative impact was minimised during these transition periods.

Teaching has improved in several ways. Planning takes account of individual needs and ensures that pupils, including the most able, receive appropriate challenge. Clear individual development targets are routinely set in English and mathematics, evaluated by teachers and pupils regularly, and used effectively to guide teachers' planning. Consequently, nearly all pupils make good progress from their starting points on entry to the school.

Parents overwhelmingly support the school and recognise the positive impact teaching and high-quality care have on their children's learning.

The governing body carefully monitors the performance of the school and its finances. Its sharply focused strategic oversight, including that of pupil premium funding, ensures that the school achieves good value for money. Governors have good professional skills and insight. They frequently ask probing questions and robustly challenge you about your actions and their impacts. As a result, governors have a deep and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. At the start of the inspection, a small selection of required information relating to the content of the school's curriculum was missing from the school's new and easily accessible website. You and governors quickly rectified this oversight to ensure that the website meets requirements.

You and the governors have an excellent understanding of the wide range of barriers to achievement that are faced by the few disadvantaged pupils in your school. You use the school's pupil premium funds effectively to provide support that meets individual needs and helps these pupils make good progress from their starting points on entry to the school. This progress is not always evident in published assessment information because of the small numbers of pupils in each year group and the large proportion of pupils who enter the school part way through their education. Work in pupils' books and assessment information, however, show that these pupils make good progress.

The school's provision for children in the early years is strong because of the quality of teaching they receive. Staff use their detailed and meticulously maintained

records of children's achievement well to guide their planning. Children in the early years, including those in the Nursery, learn seamlessly alongside their older peers who are in key stage 1 because activities are well matched to their abilities and interests. Children gain much from the effective use of outdoor learning, particularly the use of the extensive school grounds that stimulate, excite and intrigue them in their learning. Consequently, children make good progress from their starting points, particularly in their development of linguistic, social and mathematical skills.

The school is at the heart of the community and you and the staff have excellent relationships with parents and other local childcare providers. You also ensure that pupils learn beyond their immediate community. Pupils have a good understanding of fundamental British values, including understanding the rule of law, democracy and a range of other faiths and beliefs, because of the teaching and experiences provided for them. As a result, pupils are well prepared to be citizens in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are secure and are followed meticulously, with detailed records. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff have up-to-date knowledge of current safeguarding requirements and are vigilant about the risks posed to pupils, including radicalisation and extremism, because of the training and frequent updates they receive. The school has appropriate monitoring and filtering in place for its internet connection and strong online safety procedures. Consequently, on the rare occasions when possible concerns about online content have been identified, school leaders have been quick and effective in dealing with the issue to prevent any risk to pupils.

Pupils feel safe in school and enjoy their school life. They have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and say it is rare. Pupils are confident that teachers will deal effectively with any concerns they may have. School records show that pupils' behaviour is well managed in school. Younger members of the school are well cared for by staff and their older peers. This kind and caring behaviour exemplifies the school's core Christian ethos.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement because of the rigour of your monitoring. As a result, your school development plan is detailed and well constructed. It contains the right priorities for further improvement. Your considered and well-targeted actions, including the effective use of collaboration between the two schools you lead, have resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils achieve well from their starting points on entry to the school. You correctly identify areas where further action is necessary. These include enhancing the quality of teaching in key stage 2, and developing further pupils' accurate use of spelling and English grammar in their writing.

- Governors have a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They hold you closely to account through their probing questions and incisive use of the clear information you provide for them about the impact of your actions. Governors, many of whom have professional educational backgrounds, use their skills well and have a detailed understanding of the use and effectiveness of pupil premium funding because of the clear information they receive about the impact of actions and pupils' achievement.
- You make effective use of the good-quality support and guidance you receive from the local authority's adviser to check the accuracy of your self-evaluation and to sound out your ideas for further improvement.
- Pupils in all groups, including the least able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils, read widely and often. They are proud of their school library and visit it frequently. Pupils develop their good levels of reading fluency and use their phonic skills well to help them read unfamiliar words. Older pupils speak confidently about their favourite authors and are able to explain the plots of some Shakespearean plays. Teachers match pupils' reading books well to their stages of reading development and ensure that they are appropriate to their age.
- Teachers and other adults have high expectation of pupils and a detailed knowledge of each individual's strengths and areas for development. They use this knowledge well to plan learning. Teachers and other adults use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and develop their abilities to explain confidently the reasoning behind their answers. Staff changes have led to a small loss of pace in the improvements in key stage 2, though teaching remains strong.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and ensures that pupils acquire knowledge in a wide range of subjects. Pupils have many opportunities to widen their horizons to learn about the diverse culture of modern Britain. The outdoor environment is well developed to stimulate learning for pupils of all ages.
- The number of pupils taking standardised tests each year is very small and comparisons with national data are therefore unreliable. Your careful analysis of test results allows you to identify specific barriers to learning for individual pupils, reflect upon them, and act to improve the quality of teaching. Most pupils make good progress from their starting points. In 2016, achievement in mathematics and writing was stronger than that of reading because of the increased focus you had placed on these subjects. In 2016, no pupils sat the key stage 1 national assessments. Over time, achievement in key stage 1 shows that you have prepared pupils well for key stage 2. Phonics teaching in the school is very effective. Nearly all pupils reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check because of the teaching they receive. Those that did not reach the standard received appropriate support so that they achieved the required standard by the end of Year 2.
- The provision for children in the early years is good. All welfare requirements for children are met. Safeguarding for children in the early years is of a similar high standard as seen for all other pupils in the school. Children join the early years with a range of levels of development. They benefit from good teaching and they make good progress from their starting points, particularly in the areas of communication, language and literacy, number and calculation, shape, space

and measure, and physical development. Children are articulate communicators who play collaboratively together. They feel safe in school and quickly develop their confidence because of the nurturing environment in which they learn effectively. Leaders are ambitious for the children. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths in the early years and plan further improvements to the provision, including enhancing the outdoor yard area, to make it even better.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new staff who join the school in key stage 2 consistently share the same high expectations seen across the school
- teachers focus on pupils' use of English grammar and spelling so that the pace of improvement accelerates.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Blackburn, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the teaching staff and governors, including the chair of the standards and effectiveness committee and chair of the governing body. I also met with the local authority's adviser who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school. I took account of the information contained within responses to the online questionnaires for parents.

I visited all classrooms to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books and listened to some pupils read. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and action plans and looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record keeping.

The areas focused on during the inspection included:

- the effectiveness of governors' monitoring of the school's work
- the impact of the school's spending of the pupil premium on the progress of

disadvantaged pupils

- the effectiveness of the actions taken to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection
- the quality of provision for children in the early years.