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28 January 2019

Miss Frances Brady
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Dear Miss Brady

Short inspection of Haslingden St James Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2019, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school's journey since it was last inspected has not been an entirely smooth one, and standards in teaching and pupils' achievement have been variable. Since taking up your posts, though, you and the deputy headteacher have determinedly tackled any weaknesses that had developed and the school is once again in a strong position. Your ambition does not stop there, though, and the current building developments when I visited are just one part of the shared vision that leaders and governors have to improve the school further.

You, other leaders and the governors all know the school well. This is evident from your sharp and insightful self-evaluation, which you have used to good effect in drawing up the school improvement plan. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Teachers say that they work well together to share ideas and learn from good practice. They are very positive about the professional development they are given. Where teaching has been less effective, you have not shied away from addressing this. Teachers know what is expected of them and work successfully to provide pupils with learning that is engaging and effective. The proportions of the most able pupils in key stage 2 reaching the higher standard in reading and mathematics, or writing at greater depth, are increasing because work is well matched to their learning needs.

Pupils are polite and articulate. Their behaviour in class and around the school and

on the playground is consistently good. They were keen to tell me how they make sure that nobody is left on their own at breaktime and everyone in their school is treated fairly and equally. Relationships throughout the school between staff and pupils are warm and positive.

Pupils have positive attitudes towards school and happily talk about things they have enjoyed learning. The school's curriculum provides them with a good breadth of learning across a wide range of subjects. Pupils' work shows that they are building up their subject-specific skills and knowledge, such as in work seen in key stage 1, where they were making comparisons between how fires are tackled today and at the time of the Great Fire of London. Pupils say that they enjoy the different clubs on offer after school, such as multi-sports and singing, and they like going on trips, such as a science-focused day at the University of Central Lancashire.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and there is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school. The school's website provides parents and carers with helpful information about keeping their children safe online, and pupils have a good understanding of e-safety. For example, they know not to share personal information over the internet. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that their teachers will look after them.

Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training. Leaders make sure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors and regular visitors to the school to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children. Records of these checks, along with other records relating to safeguarding, are detailed and of a good quality. Leaders work in partnership with external agencies to ensure that concerns about pupils' welfare are addressed and support quickly put in place.

Inspection findings

- The inspection followed a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on the quality of provision in early years. Over time, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has typically been below average.
- Leaders have worked successfully to improve the effectiveness of provision in early years, and their efforts are now bearing fruit. The decision to bring Nursery and Reception classes together as a single unit has been very successful. Staff work well together and have developed a bright and engaging learning environment. Children move happily between the two rooms, accessing a good range of learning activities.
- Staff focus heavily on improving children's communication and language skills, modelling speaking and listening and extending children's vocabulary at every opportunity. This is having a very positive impact on children's skills and confidence. In 2018, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development rose considerably to be broadly in line with other schools nationally.

- My second line of enquiry looked at what leaders had done to bring about improvements in pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2, and whether these improvements had been sustained this year.
- Leaders, staff and pupils all told me that reading had been a major focus for the school over the past year. The leader responsible for English had been systematic in identifying areas that required improvement, such as the effectiveness of guided reading, and then implemented a well-focused plan to bring about those improvements. This work was supported to good effect by subject specialists from the local authority, who led training for staff and supported leaders in checking the progress being made.
- It was clear that the impact of this work went beyond improved results for last year's Year 6 pupils. Current pupils told me that they had been inspired to read by events in school during National Storytelling Week and by the novels that each class now reads every day. They listed Michael Morpurgo, David Walliams and Roald Dahl among their favourite authors, and could talk thoughtfully about how particular passages in their books built up suspense or told them more details about a character. Their attitudes to reading were extremely positive, to the extent that their main wish for the school was to have a bigger library.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how well the most able pupils in key stage 1 were challenged to work at greater depth in English and mathematics. While attainment at the higher standard improved significantly in key stage 2 in 2018, very few pupils reached greater depth in key stage 1.
- One key factor has been some variability in the quality of teaching over time in key stage 1, some of which has been caused by unavoidable staff absences and difficulties in recruiting teachers on a short-term basis.
- There are positive signs, particularly in Year 1, that teachers are now providing the most able pupils with activities that stretch and challenge their learning more effectively. Pupils have responded well to these higher expectations and there are examples of high-quality writing and mathematics work in pupils' books. However, the school's tracking information and pupils' work in Year 2 show that many of the most able pupils are still prone to making basic errors and so not achieving to their maximum potential.
- I finally looked at what you were doing to tackle persistent absence and improve attendance, as the school has been performing less well in this area than most schools across the country.
- There is no doubting the effort that you have put into improving pupils' attendance. Any absences are followed up immediately and the pastoral team, including the learning mentor and family worker, provide families with support to overcome any barriers to good attendance that they may have. Systems to reward regular attendance are in place and you have also taken firm action and used the fines system when appropriate. As a result of your rigorous approach, overall rates of attendance are showing some signs of improvement.
- The biggest challenge you face with regard to attendance is children having extended periods of leave, which can mean them missing a number of weeks of school at a time. These lengthy absences have a significantly negative impact on

the school's figure for persistent absence, which is consistently markedly above average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- an increased proportion of the most able pupils achieve greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1
- rates of persistent absence are reduced by making sure that parents recognise the impact on pupils' learning of taking extended leave during term time.

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

Neil Dixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you and other school leaders. I also had meetings with four members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. I met one group of pupils to talk about school life and heard another group of pupils read. I considered 21 responses to the staff survey and 13 responses to the pupils' survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also studied a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.