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Mrs Jill Brenchley  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Alkrington  
Boardman Fold Road  
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Dear Mrs Brenchley

### **Short inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Alkrington**

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 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 June 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide strong direction in maintaining the vision that St Michael's 'educates the whole child'. The culture of your school is underpinned by the Christian values which you have woven through every aspect of school life. You are ably supported by a committed senior leadership team and staff who liaise closely. In unison, you have developed your 'rich and relevant' curriculum in response to the needs, interests and aptitudes of your pupils. As a team, you draw strength from each other's skills and expertise. This strength has led you to developing your new approach to assessment in mathematics and writing, which staff and pupils alike have embraced.

Your team's spirit has enabled you to respond effectively to the recent turbulence in staffing; you have kept the needs of pupils at the forefront of your plans, not letting the high standards you expect slip. This team spirit spills over into all aspects of school life and you and your staff make St Michael's a happy place to be.

You have addressed the areas identified as needing improvement at the last Ofsted inspection. By the time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 1, they are doing much better in mathematics than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. At

the end of Year 6 in 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in mathematics was broadly in line with that seen nationally. Nevertheless, too often opportunities are missed across the school to challenge your most-able pupils with rich and sophisticated problems. You have worked hard to improve the quality of outdoor provision in the early years, and outcomes for your youngest pupils have improved.

In addition, recognising the need to inspire and enthuse pupils, you have focused on improving the way writing is taught across the school. Pupils' books show that they now write in a range of subjects for a variety of purposes. As a result, outcomes in writing have improved at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2. Nonetheless, as with mathematics, your teachers miss opportunities to present the most-able pupils with challenging work which would help more of them reach the higher levels of which they are capable.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your staff have established a culture of vigilance throughout the school. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure the suitability of staff recruited to work with your children. The school's child protection procedures are appropriate and leaders know what to do in the event of any safeguarding concerns. The staff and pupils who spoke to me during the inspection are unanimous in their view that pupils are safe and well cared for at school. Thanks to the e-cadets, a group of pupils trained to advise their peers on internet safety, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils say there is very little bullying or poor behaviour and any occurrence is quickly and effectively dealt with by staff.

### **Inspection findings**

- Staff, parents and pupils have absolute confidence in you and your senior leadership team. Everyone is clear about the high expectations expected of them but know that they will always be well supported to meet them. You and your leadership team have an accurate view of the strengths of St Michael's and you have not shied away from tackling those areas requiring improvement. Everyone is quite rightly proud of their school.
- You capture pupils' imaginations through your 'rich and relevant' curriculum. Pupils are enthused by the range of memorable learning activities presented to them; for example, Year 6's hard-hitting newspaper reports about the Challenger space shuttle disaster captured their imagination. Their writing showcased the wealth of literary devices they have at their fingertips as well as the depth of knowledge that they have acquired about space exploration. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their visit to Staircase House as part of their learning about the Great Fire of London, taking part in sporting events such as cross-country running, and composing thank-you letters to enter a recent Post Office competition.

- Governors have not wasted time since the last inspection. They have recognised the need to 'raise the bar' and increase their impact on school improvement. They have used the findings from a skills audit well to make sure they recruit new governors with the expertise needed to drive the school forward. Governors gather their intelligence from a range of sources to be sure that they have a well-informed view of the school. Their application for Governor Mark accreditation should safeguard them against complacency and make certain that they continue to provide you with constructive challenge and support. However, governors have not always ensured that the school's website contains all the required information. They have planned actions to address these omissions quickly.
- From their different starting points, you ensure that your pupils make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through school. As a result, by the time they are in Year 6, almost all pupils are working at or above standards expected for their age.
- You and your senior leaders can be commended for the well-considered systems you have devised for assessment. In the classroom, teachers are adept at gathering information about pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. They use this information well to provide their pupils with incisive feedback and to plan the next steps in pupils' learning. Pupils find this information useful in helping them improve their work.
- As leaders, you are using the information gathered by teachers well to identify any pupils falling behind and swiftly put actions in place to help those pupils catch up.
- Staff share your commitment to the importance of developing the character traits, attributes and behaviours that underpin success in school and life. You are rightly proud of the school's great achievement in being nominated as the regional winner of the Department for Education Character Award. Your pupils are caring and considerate. They wear their uniforms with pride. They show respect to each other and to adults in school.
- Parents are keen to contribute to the life of the school. The recent changes to homework have clearly enthused them and their children. Year 1 pupils and parents are proud of their models, masks and pictures they designed and made as part of a recent project about traditional tales. Nearly all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were positive about how well the school is run and almost all of them would recommend the school to another parent.
- Pupils flourish during their time at St Michael's. They speak positively of the positions of responsibility held by their peers, including school councillors and house captains. Pupils appreciate the wealth of sporting and musical opportunities available to them. Currently, 93 pupils are learning to play a musical instrument.
- Your teachers' good subject knowledge, accurate picture of the pupils' learning and willingness to take risks result in pupils who are keen to learn. Pupils like to please, are willing to 'have a go' and they take pride in their work. This positive culture secures good outcomes for pupils across the school.

- However, there is room for improvement. Although you offer some clubs and activities to develop your most-able pupils, there needs to be greater priority given to meeting the needs of these pupils so that more of them achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.
- You recognise and value the high levels of expertise among your team members, ensuring that they have ample opportunities to apply and enhance their knowledge and skills to have the best impact on pupils' achievement. Staff are appreciative of the wealth of opportunities they are given to develop professionally.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff in all years accelerate the most-able pupils' rates of progress so that a larger proportion exceed expectations at the end of the early years and at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2
- the governing body has effective systems in place to check that the school's website, including policies, is up to date and fully meets requirements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Manchester, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke to you, your leadership team, members of the governing body, a group of staff and a group of pupils. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority. Together, we made short visits to lessons during which I spoke to pupils and looked at the quality of their work. I looked at the survey results from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and considered the comments provided. I reviewed your self-evaluation as well as a range of other documentation. I also checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and recruitment information.