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Mrs Amanda Pitcher
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pitcher

Short inspection of Boltons CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 March 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your staff, parents, pupils and governors have absolute confidence in your leadership. You have been ably supported by your very committed senior teacher and the rest of your teaching team, in improving the school. You, your staff and governors have a shared vision of high standards for every pupil. Your school motto is 'Love, Laugh, and Learn' and this is at the heart of your mission at Boltons. You and your team have maintained this friendly, vibrant learning community where pupils feel happy, safe and well cared for. Everyone is quite rightly proud of their school.

At the previous inspection, the inspector reported that the achievement of pupils and quality of teaching were good. This continues to be the case. Your pupils make good progress from their different starting points. You have tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The progress of all pupils in writing has improved steadily, including that of boys.

You have identified spelling as an area for further improvement and put a range of measures in place to address this. Your teachers continually assess pupils' work, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and make sure that pupils know how to improve. Pupils who spoke to me talked about how much they enjoy writing. You have also taken action to provide pupils with a wealth of opportunities to practise their writing, both in their English lessons and across the curriculum.

You have improved outdoor provision in early years, giving the children access to a broader range of stimulating and exciting activities. You have also introduced a more systematic approach to teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make).

Children benefit from the small-group, structured daily teaching sessions. As a result, outcomes are improving and in 2015 were well above average.

Your teachers plan their lessons to make sure that most pupils make good progress. Teachers use questioning well to ascertain pupils' knowledge and deepen their understanding. As a team, you keep a close eye on the progress of every child, swiftly identifying any pupils falling behind and helping them to catch up quickly. You ensure that pupils who have special educational needs or disability, as well as those pupils eligible for free school meals, make good progress, but sometimes the most-able pupils are not challenged enough.

You and your staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils conduct themselves well around school. Pupils are smart and well mannered. In lessons they listen attentively to their teachers and each other, confidently asking questions and sharing ideas. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 enjoy the responsibilities they have been given. Year 6 pupils are diligent in their roles as buddies, helping the youngest pupils settle in quickly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff, parents and pupils are in agreement that pupils are safe and well cared for. Staff are vigilant to protect pupils from harm because leaders have ensured that staff training is up to date. Records show that leaders take effective action to tackle any safeguarding concerns. Governors have prioritised safeguarding as an item on the agenda of all full governing body meetings. You and the Chair of the Governing Body are trained in safer recruitment practices.

Pupils say bullying and poor behaviour are very rare and that these incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including online, and know whom to talk to if they are worried about anything.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate view of your school's strengths and areas for further development. You use a wealth of evidence to support your evaluations and make sure that your actions focus on those areas which require further development. For example, the impact of your actions to improve pupils' spelling is clearly evidenced in pupils' writing books. As a result, you have maintained the good standards observed at the last inspection.
- You regularly check teaching and learning. Your staff value your feedback and willingness to work alongside them to improve practice.

- Not only you but all your teachers work well together sharing best practice. As a team, you know each other's strengths well and use these to good effect. Pupils talk positively about the specialist teaching in art, physical education (PE) and design technology. Your teachers are willing to take risks, enthusiastically incorporating new ideas into their practice. This makes your school an exciting place in which to learn.
- Professional training to extend teachers' skills is a strength of the school. You and your team share their expertise more widely and learn from other professionals through participation in a number of networks. Regular meetings provide your teachers with opportunities to learn from the good practice in local schools, as well as to check the accuracy of your assessments of pupils' learning. Staff are appreciative of the commitment you have to developing their skills, valuing the range of courses they attend.
- Your loyal and experienced team is not complacent. Team members have high ambition for their pupils and are confident to challenge both you and each other in their drive to do their best for pupils. They value the robust systems you have in place for the management of the performance of teachers and willingly take responsibility for the part they each have to play in school improvement, particularly through their subject leadership.
- You and your team have made the most of the opportunity to develop the curriculum and sharpen assessment practice. You have made sure that the curriculum meets the needs, interests and aptitudes of your pupils and is not constrained by your organisation of some pupils into mixed-age classes. Your straightforward approach to assessment provides you and your teachers with an accurate view of how well pupils are learning, and helps teachers identify the next steps in their planning.
- You, your governors and parents have put your school at the heart of the community. Pupils take part in local events such as the forthcoming flower festival commemorating the Battle of the Somme. You welcome parents and members of the local community into your school. Parents look forward to the regular pupil-led assemblies. Recently pupils raised money to support families locally whose homes were flooded.
- You constantly review the effectiveness of your provision. The recent staffing changes you have put in place in the Key Stage 1 class are making a difference to pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are on track to achieve better outcomes, reversing the decline in 2015. You have increased expectations of what the pupils are capable of and made sure that there is a focus on pupils securing basic skills.

- Pupils make steady progress across Key Stage 2. Despite their different starting points, Year 6 pupils are on track to achieve in line with their peers and pupils nationally in 2016. Pupils find their personal target sheets helpful in knowing what they need to improve. They find their teachers' explanations helpful in understanding their work and what is expected of them.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability, disadvantaged pupils and least-able pupils make good progress. However, some most-able pupils are not challenged to achieve the higher levels of which they are capable. Pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey and spoke to the inspector report that, particularly in mathematics, work does not always require them to think hard. We discussed how reasoning and problem-solving activities would provide more challenge for all pupils, including the most able. We also discussed the importance of pushing on the 'quick graspers' to deepen their understanding, rather than allowing them to spend too long practising skills which are already secure.
- Governors have strengthened their practice since the last inspection. They make sure that they have an accurate view of how well the school is doing using a wider range of sources. Governors use their visits to school to find out first-hand the impact of decisions made in their meetings. They provide more robust challenge and support to you and your staff. Governors balance well the financial constraints of your small school making sure that resources are deployed to best effect, including the pupil premium and PE and sports funding. We discussed the urgency of publishing statutory information on the website in a format which is compliant but without identifying individual pupils.
- Your pupils' good attendance reflects their enjoyment of school. No one is in any doubt about the importance of regular school attendance. You follow up quickly on any unexplained absences.
- You teach your pupils about the beliefs and customs of different faiths including Islam and Buddhism. You, your teachers and the vicar use assemblies well to promote British values within the context of your values as a Christian community; for example, pupils recently led an assembly about the importance of being a good neighbour. Families who have moved into your community talk about how welcome they and their children have been made to feel. The younger pupils enjoy learning about how people of other faiths celebrate special events.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide the most-able pupils with more challenging activities which deepen their understanding
- 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 Carlisle, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria County 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, four members of the governing body, a group of six staff and a group of six 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 spoke to nine parents at the beginning and end of the school day. I also considered the views of 45 pupils, 16 parents and eight staff who completed the online questionnaires. 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.