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7 November 2016

Mr James Royal
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Royal

Short inspection of Blackrod Anglican/Methodist Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a clear and shared vision of the experience you want all pupils to encounter at your school. Leaders, teachers and governors understand this vision and work effectively together to achieve it. As a result, pupils are happy, safe and achieve well. They learn in the most welcoming environment of trust and respect. There is an air of calm around the school, which is the same in lessons as it is outside them.

You and other leaders have addressed the challenges of a new curriculum and new assessment arrangements well. You have worked closely with other schools and experts to finalise your plans in these areas and you check regularly to make sure that they are working. Leadership capacity has been strengthened since the last inspection. Leaders work closely with each other and also with governors to ensure that all staff are working towards the same goals and share your high expectations.

At the previous inspection, the inspector reported on the strength of pupils' behaviour and on the respect that they showed for each other and for adults. The views of your current pupils and parents, and my observations in all areas of school, confirm that this strength has been maintained. Inspectors previously reported areas for improvement in the challenge given to the most able pupils, in the pace of learning when pupils completed work independently and in ensuring that they fully understood what was expected from them in lessons. My evidence shows that you

have acted to tackle these issues. The most able pupils are challenged well in lessons, particularly in key stage 2. For example, they complete regular activities in mathematics which allow them to broaden and deepen their understanding and to use reasoning to explain their mathematical thinking. This practice is less well developed in key stage 1, however. The learning observed in pupils' books and in lessons throughout the school shows that pupils are engaged and work well in completing the tasks set for them and are clear about what is expected from them. All staff ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them and provide appropriate support when needed.

Leaders have worked successfully to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently strong in all areas of the school. You have increased the rigour of checks on the quality of teaching and learning to make sure that all pupils have the same, positive experience and that their progress is consistently strong. This has been achieved through ongoing training and by providing teachers with regular advice on how to make improvements to their practice. You and the governing body have acted decisively to make sure that any weak teaching is quickly addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is an atmosphere of care and respect throughout the school which is characterised by the very positive relationships between adults and pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe. This view is shared by the vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View. Pupils also say that any incidents are dealt with quickly and that they would be confident in speaking to an adult if they were worried about themselves or a friend.

Clear procedures are in place to ensure that children are kept safe, for example if a pupil makes a disclosure to an adult. Case studies of vulnerable pupils show that staff act quickly where they have concerns about the safety of pupils. This shows that procedures are well understood and followed through. There is a comprehensive programme of training for staff in keeping pupils safe, and this is updated regularly.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Your improvement plan is focused on the right priorities and outlines what actions need to be taken, by whom and when. We did discuss how, although priorities are accurately identified, your expected goals for each improvement point are not always clear. This means it is harder for you and other leaders, including governors, to measure your successes and check your progress towards expected goals throughout the improvement period.
- In most classes, pupils are making strong progress. Despite the increased challenge of the new curriculum and new assessment and accountability measures, you have ensured that the majority of pupils are achieving the standards expected for their age. This is true in English and mathematics and in a wide range of subjects, such as science and humanities. Work in

pupils' books shows that they study topics in depth and develop a deep and broad understanding. Examples of this are a space and planets study in Year 5, which included a visit to Jodrell Bank observatory, and a study of animals and their habitats in Year 4, including a visit from some interesting reptiles.

- Children in the early years make strong progress from their starting points. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has improved consistently and is above the national average. This means that most children are ready for learning in Year 1. Your focus on regular and effective phonics teaching has also had a positive impact. The proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected level in the phonics check has improved significantly and is now above the national average.
- You have strengthened your monitoring systems to make sure that you check regularly on the progress of different groups within the school. Checks take place with every teacher at the end of each half term, when the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils is analysed and discussed. Where your checks indicate weaker progress, such as in the achievement of girls in mathematics in 2015, you waste no time in putting plans into action to improve the situation.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress across the school. At the end of key stage 2 in 2015 standards for disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics were higher than those for other pupils nationally, including for the most able disadvantaged pupils. At the end of key stage 1, the differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics diminished from the previous year.
- Since the previous inspection, you have established a successful resourced provision for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder. The 'Dreams' facility provides strong support for these pupils. They engage well in their learning and receive expert guidance from staff. Work in their books shows that they make good progress from their starting points. The standard of work and presentation also demonstrates high expectations. These pupils engage well with their peers from mainstream classes, for example at playtimes, and are valued by others as important members of your community.
- You have rightly focused on improving attendance and reducing the amount of persistent absence over recent years. Your work has paid dividends. Attendance has improved and is above the national average, and persistent absence has been below the national average for the last two years. As we discussed, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving but is still too low.
- The learning environment around the school, including in classrooms, is bright and informative. Pupils' work is celebrated and displays in classrooms provide pupils with helpful reminders of work completed and information for ongoing learning.
- Support staff are well informed of intended learning and engage well with pupils to support them in a wide range of learning activities. In

partnership with teachers, they question, challenge and support pupils to give them every chance to meet intended learning goals.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work on reasoning, to broaden and deepen pupils' understanding in mathematics in key stage 1, is more consistently used in all classes
- strategies to improve attendance have a greater impact on disadvantaged pupils
- plans for improvement include measureable outcomes in each area, so that the impact of planned actions can be measured more easily.

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 Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and the mathematics leader. I met with four members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with parents who were bringing pupils to school and considered the responses from 28 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I visited most classrooms, including the 'Dreams' resourced provision classroom, jointly with you or the assistant headteacher, to observe and speak with pupils about their learning. I also scrutinised pupils' books from a range of subjects from each class.

I considered a wide range of documentation and information relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, attendance, governance, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding.

Several lines of enquiry were pursued on inspection. These included whether all groups of pupils were making enough progress in mathematics; challenge for the most able including the most able disadvantaged pupils; pupils' progress in all subjects across the curriculum; the attendance of all groups of pupils; and the strength of the early years.

The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.