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Mrs Joanne Duckworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Duckworth

Short inspection of Hoole St Michael CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following a period of turbulence in the stability of staffing, beyond your control, all members of staff are now back in their posts and performing well.

The leaders of English and mathematics have an accurate and detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects because of their frequent monitoring. They have a clear vision and commitment to ensuring that pupils get the best education possible. Their actions are appropriate and have positive impact. Consequently, the progress made by most pupils from their different starting points, particularly in mathematics in key stage 2, is improving quickly. However, further work is needed to enhance the level of challenge presented in mathematics to a small number of the most able pupils in some year groups.

Governors receive comprehensive information that gives them a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They make good use of their professional skills to interpret the information they receive about pupils' achievement. Governors rigorously monitor all aspects of the school's performance, including the impact of the pupil premium grant on the achievement of the very small numbers of disadvantaged pupils. Minutes of governing body meetings, including that of its committees, show that governors frequently ask challenging

and probing questions that rightly hold senior leaders closely to account for their actions. As a result of this robust challenge, leaders have improved the support for parents who are keen to help their children at home by running workshops on the methods taught by the school to solve calculation problems.

At the start of the inspection, governors had not ensured that all the required information was published on the school's website. Leaders quickly addressed the small number of omissions including some information about pupils' achievement. The website is informative and provides a high-quality point of reference about the school for parents and the wider community.

Improvements have been made with regard to increasing pupils' attainment in mathematics, the area identified for development in March 2012. Appropriate training has developed teachers' skills. Sharper and more frequent scrutiny by leaders means that teachers are now held more closely to account. Since the last inspection pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved. However, in the 2016 end of key stage 2 statutory tests a small group of pupils with higher prior attainment did not make the progress expected of them. Current work in pupils' books and the analysis of pupils' progress shows that leaders' actions have quickly addressed this issue.

Pupils have more opportunities to undertake mathematical investigations and apply their skills and knowledge to solve complex problems. Additional catch-up sessions and after-school clubs in school run by teachers boost pupils' confidence and help them improve their mathematical skills. Pupils who attend mathematics clubs speak highly of the help they receive and about how their love of mathematics has grown. Additional training has ensured that staff are well equipped with skills to develop pupils' investigation skills and give appropriate challenge to the most able. For example, pupils in one key stage 2 class demonstrated their growing confidence by clearly explaining how they applied their knowledge and understanding of area and perimeter to solve challenging problems involving rectilinear shapes.

Pupils' exemplary conduct and good attitudes to learning demonstrate the pride they have in their school. They are articulate and eager learners who welcome the opportunity to share their learning with visitors. You, staff and governors share this pride in the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who completed the questionnaire praise the level of care provided by the school and the impact it has on their children's learning.

The quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, is improving quickly because of your raised expectations and more frequent checking of teachers' planning and the work done by pupils. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers' expectations have risen and that pupils receive a greater level of challenge. However, on occasions some teachers do not ensure that all of the most able pupils receive hard enough work to challenge their thinking and deepen their understanding. Leaders are aware of this and plan appropriate actions to address it.

The progress children make in early years remains good. Children enter early years

with levels of development similar to those expected for their age and make good progress from their starting points. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development shows sustained improvement and is above the national average.

Phonics is taught effectively in the school. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in the Year 1 phonics check is in line with the national average. The few pupils who do not reach the expected standard receive good support in Year 2. In 2016, all pupils achieved the expected standard by the time they left key stage 1. Pupils use their phonic knowledge well to develop their reading skills and are confident to tackle difficult and unfamiliar words. Pupils have a love of reading and talk effusively about their favourite authors and books.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that 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 they receive. The school's commitment to safety and care is manifested in a secure and well-maintained environment in which pupils are happy and well looked after. Pupils say they feel safe in school because of the measures put into place to protect them, including the new fencing and the locked gates. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and know that it is wrong. They say that bullying is rare and that if it does occur, staff quickly and effectively deal with it. Good systems are in place to ensure that the youngest members of the school community are well cared for, including by guardian angels, a group of Year 6 pupils who partner and mentor Reception Year pupils to ensure that they feel part of this learning community.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement because of the increased rigour and frequency of your monitoring. As a result, the school development plan is detailed and well-constructed. It contains the appropriate priorities for further improvement. Your swift and well-targeted actions have resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils' achievement in the early years and in key stage 1 shows sustained improvement. Your candid evaluations ensure that you correctly identify where further action is necessary, particularly to build upon and embed the recent improvements made to pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They make good use of the information they receive and tenaciously hold you closely to account through their probing questions. Governors have a good understanding of the use and effectiveness of the pupil premium grant because of the detailed reports they receive from you at their regular standards and effectiveness committee meetings.
- Governors had not identified omissions on the school's website with regard to presentation of the impact of the school's use of pupil premium funding and pupils' progress in key stage 2. You quickly addressed this during the inspection.

- The local authority provides good support and guidance for you through an associate adviser who is the leader of an outstanding school. The adviser provides accurate assessments of the school's effectiveness and constructive feedback that helps you to develop while also promoting opportunities for you and your staff to experience and learn from excellent practice, particularly in the early years.
- Pupils in all groups, including the least able and the most able disadvantaged, read widely and often. They develop their good levels of reading fluency and have a love of books because of the effective teaching of reading in the school. Pupils study a wide range of types of literature. They speak confidently about their favourite authors and can recount stories. Pupils frequently choose their own library books that are appropriate to their age. Class reading books are chosen to present challenge to pupils that develops their understanding and vocabulary.
- The quality of teaching continues to improve. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' achievement. Regular and rigorous pupil progress meetings hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make. Teachers give appropriate guidance to pupils about how to improve their knowledge and skills.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in all groups. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and develop their abilities to talk about their learning confidently. As a result, pupils are eager learners. They are happy to talk about their studies and explain the reasons for their answers. On a few occasions, in some year groups, the work set for the most able pupils, particularly in mathematics, is too easy and does not challenge them enough to reach their full potential. You are aware that this is happening and have in place appropriate actions to support teachers to ensure that the most able are challenged effectively and consistently.
- The outcomes for early years children continue to improve over time because of improving teaching. The majority of children enter the early years with levels of development similar to those expected for their age and make good progress from their starting points. Consequently, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above the national average. There have been no disadvantaged children in the early years cohorts for the last two years. Children are well prepared for key stage 1.
- The proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics was in line with the national average in 2016. The few pupils that do not reach the expected standard in phonics are helped to catch up by effective teaching. Consequently, all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, left key stage 1 in 2016 having achieved the expected standard. There were no disadvantaged pupils in the cohort.
- In 2016, pupils achieved well in the end of key stage 1 statutory assessments and made good progress from their starting points. Results overall were in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. There were no disadvantaged pupils in the cohort. The proportion of pupils who entered the key stage with expected levels of development and went on to achieve expected standards was higher than the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The outcomes for pupils, including those of low ability, in 2016 in the end of key

stage assessment tests in key stage 2 were in line with national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. However, progress in mathematics, particularly for a small group of high-ability pupils, was significantly lower than that seen nationally for this group. Pupils of all other groups made progress in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.

- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most-able, was similar to that of other pupils nationally. In 2016 statutory assessments, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar progress to other pupils with the same starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. School-based tracking shows that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in other year groups make good progress from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievement in key stage 2, particularly in mathematics, is further enhanced by building on the good work of the subject leaders to accelerate the progress of the most able
- subject leaders are held to account for the impact of their actions with increased rigour
- the school's website is kept up to date with the required information.

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 and the subject leader for mathematics, teaching staff, and governors including the chair and vice chair of the governing body. I also met with the local authority 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 pupils, parents and staff. 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 quality of teaching mathematics, particularly in key stage 2
- the evaluation of the effectiveness of leaders' actions to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics.