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Mr Christopher Mitchell
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Dear Mr Mitchell

Short inspection of Penwortham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 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 transformed this school in the two years you have been in charge. Staff are fully supportive of the considerable changes you have made to ensure pupils learn well, are safe, happy and develop very good personal qualities. Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps in education.

You are passionate in your quest for this school to provide the very best for every one of its pupils. All of your staff have very high expectations and their enthusiasm and dedication are infectious. You know how to manage change well, what is important to change and how to change it with considerable effect.

Governors have improved the quality of support they provide the school. They are also much more challenging and better informed than before about the quality of the school's work. The governors have demonstrated good decision-making skills to support your plans to rapidly improve the school.

Pupils' achievement has consistently improved over the past few years. This is as a result of improvements to the quality of teaching, the learning environment and

resources. Teachers are now more confident in evaluating how well they are teaching and are able to reflect and improve their own practice and work effectively as a team. Teachers measure their own success by how well their pupils are performing.

Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the achievement of all pupils. They relish additional opportunities to take responsibility for supporting individuals and small groups of pupils to help them improve quickly.

Teachers are better at planning lessons. They have a much clearer understanding of what each pupil knows, understands and can do. Teachers are also clear about what pupils need to learn next to help them progress quickly.

Pupils love coming to school, as reflected in their high rates of attendance. They support each other in lessons and are enthusiastic about their work. Behaviour is very good throughout the school. Despite pupils having to work harder on much more challenging tasks, they have responded very positively to the improvements you have made. The improving curriculum is enhanced by activities that inspire pupils and give them first-hand knowledge of things they will go on to learn.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective because all adults in the school care passionately about pupils' welfare. Staff are frequently and well trained in a wide range of aspects relating to safeguarding and child protection. Potential child protection incidents are treated with considerable professionalism. The school works with a wide range of agencies and aims to achieve a coordinated approach to child protection.

Pupils know how to look after themselves and their peers, and this includes using the internet safely at school or at home. Pupils say they would confidently take advice from, or confide in, an adult if they were worried or had a concern.

Procedures to ensure pupils are safe, including the recruitment of suitable staff, are rigorous.

Inspection findings

- This school has always performed well. You have created a culture where staff and pupils are striving to achieve even greater success. You have very skilfully identified what worked well and what needed to be changed.
- Collectively, governors provide a wide range of experience and set of skills that enable them to support you and hold you rigorously to account. They have shown great belief in you and supported your strategy for rapid improvement. This is justified because you have secured significant school improvement in a relatively short period of time. You have inspired other staff to have very high expectations

of themselves and given them the belief that they too can be successful.

- You recognise that there are still improvements to be made before you would consider Penwortham Primary School as providing an outstanding education. However, you have made great strides towards this goal. Other senior leaders in the school and governors have all improved their work, encouraged and supported by you. You correctly identify that the skills of middle leaders need to be further developed, enabling them to share the leadership load and to drive key aspects of improvement.
- Inspection evidence shows that parents are firmly of the opinion that the school has improved significantly under your charge. Staff comment on the considerable improvements and support you in making further changes.
- The quality of teaching has improved considerably. Teachers and teaching assistants have benefited significantly from high-quality training. Teachers have been taught how to be more analytical about what they are doing, why they are doing it and the impact it is having on pupils. Older pupils say they have noticed a big difference in the quality of teaching. They say they have to work harder but enjoy their work and the greater challenges set for them.
- You have improved the environment of the school considerably. This is exemplified in the very creative way in which you have transformed corridors and traditional classrooms into bright and stimulating teaching spaces.
- Despite these changes you have managed the school budget well and have also been able to modernise teaching resources. For example, in addition to a well-appointed computer room, tablet computers are commonplace on pupils' desks, alongside dictionaries and other resources.
- Considerable changes to the school curriculum and how pupils are assessed have been very well managed.
- All staff are able to monitor how well individual pupils are learning. They use this information to tailor teaching so that the needs of all pupils are met. This frequent and systematic approach to evaluating progress enables early identification of pupils whose progress slows. Teachers can quickly fill gaps in learning or correct minor misunderstandings. It also enables early and accurate identification of pupils who may have a special educational need and/or a disability. These pupils progress as well as others because teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well and how to get the best out of them through personalised support. Whole-school monitoring of pupil progress and the evaluation of teaching were areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Improvements in both of these areas have been firmly established.
- You have taken significant and creative steps to improving the curriculum beyond the core subjects. Early indications of the collaborative work your school is doing with a neighbouring school suggest that pupils are enjoying a broad and balanced curriculum. Topics explored ensure learning is fun and interesting. Careful project design ensures that pupils cover all aspects of the curriculum. The collaboration enables teachers to work with fellow professionals, developing ideas and reviewing how well things have gone. This partnership has the added benefit of reducing some costs through economies of scale.
- The school has adopted the new curriculum for computing quickly and effectively. Pupils are now developing skills in computer programming, how to use logical

reasoning to explain how some simple programs work and to detect and correct errors in programs. They are developing their understanding of computer networks and how to use search technologies effectively.

- The impact of these considerable improvements across the school can be seen in improving pupil achievement and their strengthening personal development.
- Pupils achieve consistently well across all subjects and through all year groups. Those who left Year 6 last year achieved well. There had been some historical evidence that girls were not achieving as well as they should. However, this was not the case last year. Achievement in mathematics was the most significant improvement over previous years.
- Improvements in the teaching of phonics have ensured that, by the time pupils leave Year 2, almost all have secured a very good understanding. Most recently, a large proportion of pupils achieved full marks in the end of Year 1 phonics screening check.
- Children join the early years with skills and knowledge which are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress and they are well prepared for starting key stage 1.
- The progress of pupils currently in the school is at least as strong as in recent years. From their individual starting points, pupils, including the most able, are achieving well across all subjects. This does not lead to complacency but inspires both pupils and teachers because they see the rewards of their hard work. Despite pupils' reading skills being strong, the school is reviewing how they can be further improved. Pupils' number skills are very good. However, teachers have identified that pupils can improve their problem-solving skills in mathematics, and so are altering what they teach.
- Across all subjects, pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged progress as well as other pupils in the school and at least as well as other pupils nationally. This includes the most able disadvantaged pupils. There is no significant difference in how boys and girls achieve.
- There is a long-established culture in the school where pupils are expected to behave very well, and they do. They also develop very good personal skills. Teachers and leaders are now much better at evaluating the impact of all of pupils' learning experiences. Teachers and leaders identify gaps and missing opportunities that would benefit pupils. They are decisive in filling these gaps. For example, the recently formed netball club is providing an additional opportunity for pupils to engage with team sport. Teachers seek opportunities for educational visits that enhance the learning experiences of pupils and are related to the wide range of topics they are studying. Pupils' personal development is very strong. They are confident, polite and supportive of each other. They demonstrate tolerance and respect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they further extend the capacity of middle leaders, enabling them to take more responsibility in driving school improvement further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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 Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Much inspection activity was focused on:
 - pupils' achievement, including the achievement of different groups, across all subjects and key stages
 - how well pupils are protected from risks.
- I considered the breadth of pupils' experiences and the extent of their personal development.
- In addition, I considered to what extent all levels of leadership have sufficient capacity to improve the school further.

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and an assistant headteacher, a group of pupils and five members of the governing body. I met with a group of teachers and teaching assistants and a representative of the local authority. School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, information about pupils' achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited classrooms with you to speak with pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. Child protection information was scrutinised. I took account of 40 parental responses to their opportunity to pass textual comments to me. I also took account of 28 responses from pupils and 14 staff who responded to their questionnaires.