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Mrs Sue Blackburn
Headteacher
Ashton Primary School
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Dear Mrs Blackburn

Short inspection of Ashton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 2017, 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 September 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 detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of your thorough monitoring and incisive self-evaluation. Since you and your deputy headteacher were appointed, you have demonstrated a clear ambition to drive improvement. Your carefully considered and decisive actions have built on the work of your predecessor and brought about rapid improvements to pupils' learning.

The school has strong capacity to continue to improve. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved. Teachers and teaching assistants are better trained and deployed. You check their impact on pupils' learning rigorously. As a result, pupils, including those most able, are making better progress. Staff rise to your high expectations and know that you are not afraid to challenge any underperformance.

You and your deputy have shared your expertise in the teaching of mathematics and reading to provide additional training for staff. Consequently, teachers and teaching assistants have improved their knowledge of the new curriculum requirements in these subjects and developed their teaching skills.

Teachers have an in-depth understanding of their pupils' skills. They use this information well to make learning interesting, plan appropriate challenge and provide additional support where necessary. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and make strong progress.

You were rightly concerned about the outcomes for some disadvantaged pupils in the 2016 key stage 2 statutory assessments. In particular, you recognised a weakness in the rate of progress made in reading by middle-ability disadvantaged pupils, many of whom were boys. A small number of your least-able pupils made weaker progress than was expected in mathematics. You responded immediately to address these issues, and disadvantaged pupils are now taught and supported more effectively. However, you recognise that further work is needed to diminish the difference between their progress and that of other pupils nationally.

Your actions to improve pupils' attendance are proving successful. You monitor pupils closely and follow up any absence swiftly. You share any concerns immediately with the appropriate agencies. The learning mentors and family support worker educate pupils about the importance of coming to school regularly and offer appropriate support to parents. Attendance has improved to be close to the national average. However, a small number of pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, do not come to school often enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and followed meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children and appropriate security is in place to ensure the safety of pupils on your busy site. All staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding requirements and are vigilant about the risks posed to pupils, because of the training and frequent updates they receive.

The school has appropriate monitoring and filtering in place for its internet connection and effective online safety procedures.

Inspection findings

- Leaders monitor the impact of their actions closely through frequent observations of teachers at work, scrutiny of pupils' work in books and half-termly meetings with teachers to discuss the progress pupils are making. Consequently, you have an in-depth understanding of what is working in school and where further action is required.
- You offer a wide range of activities to enable parents to participate in school life and learn how to help their children. Your website also keeps parents up to date with developments.

- Your detailed school development plan sharply focuses on appropriate priorities for improvement. It is well structured and contains ambitious targets that reflect your high expectations. The plan has well-considered measures of success that allow you and your governors to check your actions are working.
- Governors hold leaders closely to account for the impact of their actions. They have good professional skills and insight that they use effectively to monitor closely the work of the school. They often ask probing questions and regularly challenge you to ensure that the school continues to improve. Governors have detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the quality of information you and your staff provide. Governors with specific responsibilities, including those relating to safeguarding and the use of pupil premium funding, frequently visit the school to see it in operation and check the impact of your actions.
- The leadership of mathematics and reading has been significantly strengthened by the changes you have made to staff responsibilities. You and your deputy headteacher now lead these critical areas for improvement. You have high levels of subject expertise and a record of successfully driving improvement. Your decisive actions have quickly improved the quality of teaching and led to pupils making stronger progress.
- You make good use of the support from the local authority's adviser to check the accuracy of your judgments and to provide specific guidance to teachers about how to improve their practice.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. They plan learning activities that give appropriate levels of challenge and deepen their knowledge. Teachers use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and develop their confidence to explain the reasons behind their answers. Consequently, pupils are engaged in learning: their attitudes and behaviour are good.
- You use pupil premium funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils' learning. You know the challenges faced by individual pupils and frequently check that the school is doing all it can to remove barriers to their progress. Teachers and teaching assistants effectively use a wide range of strategies to improve pupils' reading and mathematical skills while your well-considered changes to staff timetables have increased the level of support disadvantaged pupils receive.
- Most-able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, receive appropriate support through carefully targeted teaching and make stronger progress.
- Children enter the school with levels of development below those typical for their age, particularly in the aspects relating to language and communication and number. Children now make good progress in the early years. This gives them a good foundation to build on.

- Pupils, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, make good progress across key stage 1 from their starting points. All pupils enter key stage 2 with the standards expected of them in phonics. In the 2016 statutory assessments, disadvantaged pupils' progress was well below the national average, particularly in reading. Work in current pupils' books and the school's own assessment data show that leaders' actions are effectively addressing this issue quickly. However, you are not complacent and recognise that further work is needed to accelerate disadvantaged pupils' progress so it is in line with that made by other pupils nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- attendance rates of pupils rise, particularly for those who are disadvantaged
- disadvantaged pupils make faster progress in reading to diminish the differences with other pupils nationally.

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

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, members of staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body. A meeting was held with the adviser from the local authority who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school. Attention was given to the information contained within responses to the online questionnaires for parents.

I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books and listened to some pupils read. Information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance was reviewed. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and action plans and considered safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record-keeping.