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Mrs Gillian Barker
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Dear Mrs Barker

Short inspection of Lostock Gralam CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and the governors are highly ambitious for your pupils. You have been unflagging in your work to provide the best possible learning environment that focuses on pupils' all-round development. I could see this very clearly in the pride that pupils and staff take in their school. It is also evident in the very positive relationships that pupils have with staff and each other. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and their attitudes to learning are very positive.

There has been some unavoidable instability in staffing in recent years, but you have managed this well. Consequently, you have maintained a good standard of teaching and learning, which is producing progress across a range of subjects that is at least good and sometimes better than this, such as in upper key stage 2.

Since the last inspection you have raised the quality of writing, so that more pupils are now using more complex sentences and punctuation and progress is good. In some year groups, such as Year 6, progress in writing is rapid, with pupils constructing sophisticated sentences, such as 'Energetic passengers pushed and tossed restlessly as they waved farewell.' Teachers also give pupils opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects, such as science or geography. However, I noticed that, in Year 3, the development of more adventurous language and structure is slower, especially for the most able. There are also examples in lower key stage 2 of writing in other subjects, such as geography and history, where tasks

are structured so that the most able pupils cannot make their own choices about content and structure.

You have also involved your subject leaders more in the process of continually improving standards in the school. They now regularly check on the quality of provision in their subject and they contribute to the school's overall improvement plan. While the plan is mostly thorough and contains appropriate actions and success measures, a few criteria used to judge the effectiveness of your actions do not focus sharply enough on the impact on pupils' achievement.

Many parents expressed their opinions about the school through Parent View, the online survey, and 11 met with me in school. The overwhelming majority of parents were highly complimentary about you, your staff and the work that you all do to make their children feel happy, safe and successful. Parents typically commented that you have established good communication channels and that you deal with any concerns effectively. They appreciate your work as a 'very caring and dedicated headteacher', praising the 'lovely atmosphere that feels like one large family'.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a particular strength. You promote this through a broad and balanced curriculum, which is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including exciting clubs, such as judo or choir. You prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain, giving older children opportunities to take responsibility for younger ones through your 'buddies' system and developing tolerance of others' faiths and beliefs through carefully planned lessons in religious education and, for example, visits to mosques. You promote British values through, for instance, a programme of collective worships, in which you explore their connection with Christian values as part of your strong church school ethos.

Safeguarding is effective.

The welcoming and nurturing atmosphere that you have created over time, allied with effective training for staff, gives your school a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Members of staff are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse and understand issues such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

Pupils say they feel safe in school because the premises are secure and they are confident that staff will help them if they have any concerns. They know how to keep safe online because of the regular reminders staff give them. They understand the different forms of bullying, but they told me that bullying of any kind is extremely rare.

Inspection findings

- I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection, some of which are reported elsewhere in this letter. You have been quick to identify areas from

the most recently published assessment information that needed your attention, especially developing writing for boys in key stage 2 and increasing the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. In your school's improvement plan you introduced new strategies, such as providing new guided reading materials to develop reading skills more rapidly; the use of 'cold' and 'hot' independent tasks, to assess more accurately pupils' knowledge before ('cold') and after ('hot') a new concept or theme is introduced; and a greater use of reasoning activities in mathematics, especially to stretch the most able.

- You have made effective use of quality reading books to inspire improved writing, especially for key stage 2 boys of lower ability. Consequently there is good progress across most year groups, with some rapid progress and high-quality writing in Years 5 and 6. However, in lower key stage 2, at times, teaching does not ensure that pupils, especially the most able, can make their own decisions about the structure and content of their writing in other subjects, such as history or science.
- Another area that I looked at was reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. Pupils are making good progress in writing, with lower ability pupils, for example, able to develop from barely recognisable letters at the start of the year to sentences that involve the word 'and', linking two shorter sentences together. Teachers give pupils the chance to use their writing skills in other subjects, such as geography, where pupils find out about continents. However, the writing they do is often in the form of one-word answers or brief phrases. This means they do not get the chance to apply their writing skills with much depth.
- In mathematics, pupils are making good progress and are acquiring the knowledge, understanding and skills they need. Pupils in Year 2 make especially good progress and most-able pupils do work that is challenging and develops their reasoning skills well, as they solve problems about time, for example.
- Pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 read well and show good comprehension and fluency that matches their age and ability. They read a wide variety of book types and enjoy reading for pleasure. Pupils use their phonics well to help them to read unfamiliar words.
- Pupils are making good progress in their learning in science and other subjects, such as history, geography and religious education. They are acquiring the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding and they have opportunities to apply their writing skills. These opportunities are particularly effective in upper key stage 2, where pupils, especially the most able, make their own choices about structure and content.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they provide more consistent challenge for the most able pupils

- they continue to embed their recent strategies for improvement to ensure rapid progress across the curriculum and throughout each year group that becomes substantial and sustained.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits to all year groups, including the early years, which were joint activities with you. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions and conversations with members of staff, governors, parents and pupils. I also had discussions with representatives from the local authority and the diocese. I listened to pupils read and analysed pupils' work. I evaluated 72 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There were no other survey responses.