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Mrs Joy Headley
Headteacher
Higher Walton Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Headley

Short inspection of Higher Walton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit on 28 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and senior leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been important changes to the leadership team, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher, new governors and several new teaching staff. The school has also very recently introduced Nursery provision. You have managed these changes well and have been successful in maintaining high morale throughout. Staff and governors are rightly proud of their school and are excited by the changes. These positive views are shared by parents, who said that you hold the well-being of each pupil in high regard and have created a learning environment where pupils can flourish. Pupils confirm that they enjoy school and recognise that they are valued.

The previous inspection in 2013 asked the school to keep rigorous checks on teaching and to share good practice. You have been successful in ensuring that you and the deputy headteacher monitor this diligently. The feedback that you give to teachers is used to strengthen classroom practice. Teachers value opportunities to learn from each other and from outstanding practice in different schools. This has a positive impact on pupils' learning. You were also asked to improve the teaching of mathematics so that pupils make consistently good progress. You have introduced new strategies to teach mathematics and most pupils make at least expected progress in developing their mathematical skills. You have identified that plans to strengthen pupils' ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and develop their reasoning skills are not yet embedded.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and the detailed records are of high quality. School leaders take their responsibility with regard to safeguarding very seriously and appropriate statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. School policies are published on its website and are compliant with government guidance. Staff are well trained in child protection.

You and your staff have created a safe environment for pupils. They say that they feel safe because they know whom to talk to if they have a problem and staff will always help them. One pupil told me that everybody has friends and nobody is left out. Children have confidence in their teachers because problems are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils have a general understanding of bullying and say that occurrences in school are rare. Some pupils, however, were less clear about different types of bullying, including homophobic and cyber bullying. Staff have covered these issues but there is still work to do to ensure that pupils fully understand them and are well prepared to deal with any incidents.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I focused my time on five different aspects. First, I investigated why pupils who are disadvantaged are more likely to have low attendance and be persistently absent. Your detailed records show that most groups of pupils have good attendance. Systems that are in place to keep checks on the absence of individual pupils are effective. Most of the very small numbers of pupils who are persistently absent have genuine medical reasons and are extremely well supported by the school's vigilant approach.
- The second focus I considered was why some pupils, especially girls, did not make the progress expected of them in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 in 2016. Following your own evaluation, you took full advantage of initiatives organised by the local authority to help pupils develop a greater resilience in their attitudes towards mathematics. Results have been positive and the pupils involved have increased in confidence and have made good progress. Work in books, as well as the school's own assessments, show that these pupils are now back on track.
- Thirdly, I focused on why the published data for key stage 2 shows that some of the middle-ability pupils in 2016 did not make enough progress in writing and mathematics. You explained that a very small number of pupils who did not do as well as they should were not able to make up the ground required by the higher expectations of the new testing regimes. You know that the small numbers in each year group mean that the published data has to be treated with caution and does not always give an accurate picture, but you do not use this as an excuse for delay.

- You recognised that pupils' handwriting skills were not as good as they could be and quickly made this a whole-school focus. The introduction of a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting is paying off. Work in pupils' books shows greater pride in presentation and more opportunities to write longer pieces of work. You ensure that additional support is provided for any pupil who starts to fall behind.
- Fourthly, I considered whether the curriculum that the school provides is broad and balanced and whether current groups of pupils are making good or better progress across a wide range of subjects. In our early conversation, we discussed the recent reorganisation of classes and subject responsibilities of different teachers as well as the introduction of Nursery provision in January. From my observations, as well as talking to staff and pupils, I was able to see that these changes have been managed well. Pupils' work shows that the school's curriculum generally contributes well to their progress across a range of subjects. Creative displays and some very good drawings and sketches show that pupils make good progress in their artistic skills. Interesting topics are planned to cover history, geography and science and there are opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in these areas. However, pupils I spoke to were not confident in their understanding of different cultures and faiths within and beyond school, other than Christianity. Nor were they familiar with the British values of democracy and tolerance. Work in pupils' books confirmed leaders' views that more needs to be done to embed this information into the curriculum to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Finally, at the start of the inspection, I looked in detail at the information published on the school's website. Minor amendments were made during the inspection to publish the updated policy for special educational needs and/or disabilities, which was in draft. Also, a duplicate copy of an old safeguarding policy was removed. The latest version was on the website. By the end of the inspection, the website was compliant with the statutory requirements to publish information.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to strengthen pupils' ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and develop their reasoning skills
- plans to teach pupils about British values include broadening their understanding of faiths other than Christianity even further to prepare them for life in modern Britain
- pupils are more confident in their understanding of different types of bullying, including homophobic and cyber bullying.

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

Catherine Parkinson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss my lines of enquiry, the progress the school has made since the last inspection and the quality of safeguarding. I met with seven governors and a representative from the local authority.

To gather information about teaching and standards, I observed teaching in all five classes and looked through some of the work in pupils' books from across the school. Twenty-eight pupils completed Ofsted's online survey.

To gather the views of parents, I looked at 18 responses to Ofsted's Parent View online questionnaire.

I spoke with several staff who shared their views verbally with me.