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14 March 2017

Mrs Marianne Mowatt  
Headteacher  
Hale Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Mowatt

### **Short inspection of Hale Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 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 January 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection because all staff, teaching and non-teaching, work together as a cohesive team to improve the school. Despite the recent absences of key members of staff, everyone has willingly 'pulled together', including governors, to distribute leadership responsibilities and to share the workload. As a result, you have made sure that learning has not been affected and most pupils have continued to reach their potential. The attention given to pupils' personal development and welfare ensures that pupils leave the school as mature and confident young people, able to articulate and express their views on a range of current affairs.

Pupils, parents and staff love the school and are overwhelmingly positive about the strong, community spirit you have created and maintained that is evident in this small school. One pupil said she could probably name every pupil in the school because 'everyone knows each other'. Pupils like the help and support that teachers and classroom assistants give to them and parents greatly appreciate the time that you and teachers freely give to talk through any concerns they have.

You have taken steps to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, although much of this work is ongoing. Achievement is not outstanding in mathematics, despite much work being done to improve teaching in this area. This is because there has been a shift in focus and your new priority is to make sure

mathematical skills and concepts are fully mastered before moving pupils on to new work. You have facilitated high-quality training for teachers as they develop their skills in planning opportunities for all pupils to solve problems in their work. Teachers successfully encourage pupils to see the relevance of their learning in mathematics through planning opportunities for them to use their skills in other areas of the curriculum such as in tackling problems with money linked to their work on 'fair trade'.

You have successfully developed strong links between governors and subject leaders who regularly check on the progress that pupils make. However, some aspects of this 'link governor' work has had to be temporarily suspended due to absence and a number of vacancies waiting to be filled by new governors.

As well as looking at how you have improved the school since the previous inspection, I wanted to find out why writing is less strong than at that time; and to find out more about how you use assessment to identify which pupils need more support, especially for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have made certain that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You know this because one of your governors has recently reviewed safeguarding in the school. All staff understand their shared responsibility to keep children safe. They have taken part in a range of training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. For example, teachers have had instructions on the safe use of mobile technologies, preventing extremist or radical views, first aid including safe defibrillator use and identifying the signs of child sexual exploitation. You give all staff regular safeguarding updates through weekly staff meetings.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in using the internet. They demonstrated their knowledge of internet 'grooming' and their confidence in what they would do if they saw something on their computer that made them feel uneasy. Pupils are happy at school and say there is no bullying. They have complete confidence in their teachers and classroom assistants being able to sort out any worries or problems they share with them.

### **Inspection findings**

- Teachers are skilled in using questioning in mathematics to encourage pupils to explain and to reason. From the range of equipment and resources that you have provided for pupils, they can choose the best resources to use and can explain how this has helped them to find an answer to a problem. For example, Year 1 pupils were confident in explaining how they could use a number line or a '100 square' in doubling.
- Teachers plan opportunities for all pupils, including the most able, to solve problems in mathematics. Pupils relish the challenge this brings and they show determination and resilience as they think harder about their work. These

changes have only recently been introduced and it is too soon to see any impact on the most able pupils making better progress than they have in the past.

- You continue to improve the curriculum and to increase the opportunities available for pupils to extend their writing across the curriculum. Handwriting is improving because teachers insist on correct letter formation from Reception and pupils are encouraged through rewards for improved handwriting.
- You have identified weaknesses in grammar, punctuation and spelling resulting in some pupils at key stage 2 not making the progress they should in their writing in 2016. Teachers now tackle these errors in a more consistent way. As a result, most pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling is improving, especially in key stage 1. Some key stage 2 pupils have more embedded weaknesses still to overcome.
- You carefully check on the progress pupils make, compared with aspirational targets and their age-related expectations. Teachers' assessments are accurate because some teachers are trained moderators and provide training on this area across the local authority. As a result, you and other leaders can rely on this information to check if improvements to teaching are successfully improving pupils' progress.
- All pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are well supported because teachers identify gaps in learning and intervene to provide tailored additional support for individual pupils and groups when this is needed.
- A key weakness in each year since the last inspection has been the below-average attendance so I wanted to look at the effectiveness of your actions to tackle this. Your analysis of attendance information shows a slight improvement in attendance for 2016/17 compared with the same period last year. This is because pupils appreciate the termly rewards given to them for good attendance, including certificates and prizes presented in assembly. However, attendance continues to be below average.
- Governors tell parents that requests for holidays during term time are unauthorised. Nevertheless, some parents continue to take their children out of school for extended holidays. This has a detrimental effect on the school's overall attendance information, as well as slowing the progress that these pupils make.
- Governors are knowledgeable, skilled and committed to improving the school further. Following their review of information on the school website, improvements are planned to make sure the information provided is helpful for parents of current pupils and also those considering the school for their children.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information on pupils' progress is checked carefully to make sure that improvements to the teaching of writing and mathematics are having an impact, especially for the most able

- further actions are taken to tackle low attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are frequently absent.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

A range of activities were carried out during this inspection to gather information on the key lines of enquiry. For example, I met with you, other leaders and staff, a group of governors and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with your school improvement partner in a telephone conversation and talked with parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day. I talked with pupils when you joined me in visits to lessons, listened to pupils read and met with representatives from the school council. A range of documentation was also scrutinised to find out about safeguarding procedures in the school.