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Mr Stephen Knight
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Dear Mr Knight

Short inspection of Abbey Village Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, and has ensured that Abbey Village School continues to improve. You and your fellow leaders have created a school in which pupils feel safe, happy and well cared for. This is because the school has a very clear ethos of accepting and respecting people's differences, which one pupil summed up well: 'Everyone is a different shape or size or different colour but it doesn't matter.' Staff say that they enjoy coming to work, and relationships between staff and pupils in school are warm and friendly.

Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. Their conduct around school and on the playground is consistently good, and older pupils show maturity in the way that they take care of their younger classmates. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning in their lessons, and say that they enjoy a range of different subjects. This is because the curriculum at Abbey Village School is appropriately broad and interesting. Pupils told me that they have particularly enjoyed the school trips that they have been on, such as to the Beatrix Potter Experience in the Lake District. The curriculum is also enhanced by pupils having access to resources such as the school garden.

Pupils are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles and the wide range of play equipment available on the playground provides plenty of opportunities for pupils to be active during breaktimes. The curriculum also helps pupils to learn about British values. Pupils were able to show their knowledge of democracy by explaining that the Prime Minister of the UK and the President of the United States were both elected.

One area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report was for teachers to provide pupils with more opportunities to work things out for themselves. It is clear from the work in pupils' books that teachers are regularly giving them problems to tackle in mathematics, and that pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise using their writing skills in their own pieces of written work. Older pupils were also able to explain to me what they needed to do to improve their work, such as improving their handwriting or working on recall of multiplication tables. This was another area that the school was asked to work on following the last inspection, and where there have been clear improvements.

You acknowledge that the results in the 2016 key stage 1 and key stage 2 assessments show that there is still more to be done to secure the very best outcomes for the most able pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics. In mathematics, there is currently a lack of consistency across the school's three classes in how calculation is taught. As a result, pupils' understanding is not consistently secure and this is leading to some periods of slower progress for all pupils, including the most able. It is also clear from pupils' work in mathematics that teachers ensure that they give effective extra support to those who need it. However, teachers do not always provide the most able pupils with enough challenge to stretch their thinking fully.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Staff and governors take part in regular training so that they have up-to-date knowledge of the latest good practice in safeguarding. As a result, they have a good understanding of signs that might indicate that all is not well with a pupil. They also know the appropriate procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil's well-being. Leaders responsible for overseeing safeguarding ensure that any concerns are carefully documented and followed up. The school has established effective links with external agencies to provide additional help to the most vulnerable pupils and their families.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have a good understanding of different situations in which they would need to keep themselves safe. Older pupils speak confidently about staying safe online and understand the need to use social media in a responsible way.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. One of these was to see whether pupils are making fast enough progress and achieving as well as they can in mathematics. Over time, results in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 have typically not been as strong as in reading and writing. The inconsistency in teaching calculation is a key factor in this. For example, there is a significant difference in teachers' expectations of the layout and accuracy of pupils' mathematical recording, which is then causing some pupils to make unnecessary mistakes when later using formal calculation strategies. Leaders have introduced a new scheme to support teachers' planning in mathematics, but there is still some way to go to secure the required consistency in the teaching of this aspect of mathematics.
- Another key line of enquiry for this inspection was to consider why pupils' attainment in writing and phonics has been typically stronger than in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Writing is taught effectively throughout the school, and teachers make sure that they give pupils plenty of opportunities to practise their writing skills. This was evident both in work in pupils' books and in classroom displays, which included examples of pupils' writing in different subjects, such as letters written as part of their history work. Grammar, punctuation and spelling skills are now being taught in a more focused way, particularly in key stage 1 and the lower part of key stage 2. Older pupils are then building on these skills in their writing, and their use of more complex punctuation is becoming more secure. This confirms that more pupils are working at the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling and the most able pupils are beginning to reach the higher level.
- The final line of enquiry looked at how effectively the school is meeting the needs of pupils in its mixed-age classes, and in particular the needs of children in Reception class. Children get off to a flying start to their time at Abbey Village School because of highly effective teaching and learning in the early years. Staff have made good use of the large classroom that is shared by Reception and Year 1 so that children have access to all areas of the early years curriculum. There is an appropriate balance of activities led by adults and ones that children choose for themselves and staff ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for Reception children to work together as a group. As a result, the proportion of children leaving Reception class having achieved a good level of development has increased each year.
- The approach in the mixed-age Reception and Year 1 class is mirrored in the other mixed-age classes. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure that work is well matched to the needs of each year group within the class, and each year group will often spend part of a lesson working separately. Where year groups are working together, teachers skilfully adapt and target their questioning to take account of pupils' different ages and abilities.

- One key strength of the school is how well school leaders, including governors, know the school and recognise its strengths and weaknesses. The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate, and improvement plans are focused on appropriate, achievable goals. Staff are overwhelmingly supportive and it is clear that both the staff and governors share your desire for the school to continue to improve.
- The large majority of parents that I spoke to, and those who responded to the Parent View survey, were very positive about the school and many commented positively about the school's nurturing approach and 'community' feel. Almost all would recommend the school to another parent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school develops a more consistent approach to teaching and recording calculation so that pupils are able to build more effectively on their mathematical knowledge from year to year and so make more rapid progress
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve, particularly in mathematics, so that more reach the high standards of which they are capable.

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 Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you and the leader responsible for early years. I also met a group of teaching and support staff, a representative of the local authority and a governor. I had a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body. I considered 41 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View and spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes to observe teaching and learning in several subjects and together we also looked at a sample of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.