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Mr Martin Flute
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Dear Mr Flute

Short inspection of Latchford St James CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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, and has ensured that the school has continued to improve. The school provides its pupils with a safe and welcoming learning environment in which they are encouraged to develop both academically and as thoughtful and responsible citizens. Pupils told me that they enjoy coming to school and virtually all of the parents who responded to the 'Parent View' survey said that their children were happy at Latchford St James.

Pupils are well mannered and friendly. Their conduct around school is good and at breaktimes they get on well together on the playground. Younger pupils enjoy using a range of different play equipment while older pupils take part in games of football and netball or make use of the quiet areas to talk with friends. Throughout the school, there are warm and positive relationships between staff and pupils. In class, pupils display good attitudes to learning, listening well to teachers' explanations and instructions and settling quickly to their work.

The school's curriculum is broad and well balanced, providing pupils with a good range of learning experiences. Provision for modern foreign languages is particularly strong in key stage 2. Pupils in Year 6 were understandably excited about their upcoming residential trip to Spain, where they were looking forward to practising their language skills. A range of other trips and subject-focused activities, such as arts week and science workshops, further enrich the curriculum. Pupils are taught about the importance of living healthily, and can be seen putting this knowledge

into practice at breaktimes when selecting snacks from the school's 'healthy tuckshop'. They also have plenty of opportunity to take part in physical activities in school and as part of the range of after-school clubs.

You have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Pupils are being given opportunities to develop their writing skills in different areas of the curriculum, such as when writing recounts in history or describing experiments in science. Teachers are also making sure that pupils are encouraged to develop their skills in problem solving. I saw an example of this with pupils in Year 1 enthusiastically working together to tackle mathematical problems, finding one more and one less. The pupils had the confidence in their skills to explain to me how they had gone about the task and worked out the answers.

Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is honest and accurate, and you acknowledge that there are further improvements to be made. In 2016, the results of the national assessments for key stages 1 and 2, and the Year 1 phonics check indicated a decline in the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading and phonics. They also showed that the most able pupils were less likely to reach the higher levels in mathematics than in reading and writing. Leaders have responded decisively, revising strategies for the teaching of reading and phonics, and changing the school timetable to include an additional mathematical skills session. Inspection evidence confirms that these actions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. There is, though, still scope for further improvement in terms of ensuring that teachers consistently set their sights high enough for the most able pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose: records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that they maintain a good, up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding matters. This is reinforced by notices around school, including a child-friendly summary of the safeguarding policy developed with pupils.

Staff have a clear understanding of what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's safety or well-being, and leaders ensure that any such concerns are followed up quickly. The school has established good links with external agencies to make sure that support is given to those pupils and families who need it. Leaders also ensure that 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.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and talk confidently about things that they have learned about staying safe near roads and railways. They understand what bullying is, but say that bullying in their school is rare. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of staying safe when using the internet or social media, for example by not giving personal details to people they do not know or sharing their passwords with anyone.

Inspection findings

- The inspection looked at a number of different key lines of enquiry. One of these was to consider how effectively reading is being taught in key stage 2, as results in 2016 indicated a dip in performance. Leaders have recognised this issue and have taken rigorous actions to ensure that standards return to their former levels. The school's approach to reading now has a clearer structure. Guided reading sessions are being used to develop pupils' skills of inference and deduction, and teachers demonstrate good questioning skills to challenge pupils to think carefully about the text they are reading. Pupils' progress in reading is more accurately tracked through revised assessment procedures, so that additional help can be given to those who need it. Staff have benefited from a range of professional development opportunities, including observing other effective practice, and this has helped to build up their skills. As a result, pupils are becoming confident and thoughtful readers, and inspection evidence confirmed that standards in reading are rising strongly again.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on the progress and attainment of the most able pupils in the school. I was particularly interested in looking at their performance in mathematics, as this has typically been lower than in reading and writing. The leader for mathematics has a clear understanding of the issue and has put into action a well-thought-out plan to tackle it. Her analysis showed that many pupils, including the most able, did not have a secure knowledge of some of the key building blocks for mathematical fluency, such as times tables and common number relationships. As a result, too many were making needless errors. A dedicated morning session has been introduced to address this gap, and this is having a positive impact. Teachers are also making sure that they provide pupils with opportunities to apply their skills by solving mathematical problems. There are positive signs that these actions are accelerating progress for the most able pupils in many classes, but there are still some inconsistencies. There is also scope for the school to make better use of assessment data to track most-able pupils more closely to check that their progress is accelerating.
- The third key line of enquiry was prompted by a decline in results in the Year 1 phonics check, which were below the national average in 2016. It is clear that pupils are making stronger progress this year and the proportion of pupils working at the expected level is rising. This is because leaders have introduced a more structured approach to teaching phonics that builds skills more systematically, and are keeping a closer check on the progress that pupils are making. This information is used to identify pupils who need extra support, and interventions are put in place that help them to catch up. Children in the early years get off to a particularly good start in developing their phonics skills because their teachers are knowledgeable and ensure that phonics sessions are well planned and engaging.
- One important factor in the improvements that have been made by the school is the quality of leadership demonstrated by both yourself and other leaders in the school. You know the school very well, recognise its strengths and weaknesses and provide calm and thoughtful leadership. Where swift action is needed, it is taken. For example, you quickly and efficiently dealt with gaps in the school

website that had been caused by issues with the hosting service, so that the website complied with statutory requirements. Governors provide support and challenge to leaders, and show a clear commitment to the school. They acknowledge, however, that their understanding and use of school performance data could be strengthened.

- Other leadership in the school, including subject leadership and the leadership of the early years, is strong. There have been significant improvements in the effectiveness of provision in the early years since the previous inspection, and this is now a key strength of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently have the highest expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve, set work that challenges their thinking and carefully monitor their progress
- governors develop their skills and confidence in using school performance data to rigorously hold school leaders to account.

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 Warrington. 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, five members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority and diocese. I also met a group of teaching and support staff and the leaders responsible for mathematics and phonics. I considered 12 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke informally with a small number of 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 in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.