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Dear Mrs Deborah Metcalfe

### **Short inspection of Whittle-le-Woods Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have created an ethos in which everyone is expected to be the best they can be. Driving this principle are the rigorous processes you have put in place to check how well the school's work enables all pupils to achieve their potential, both academically and personally. This unwavering goal, and your strong conviction that learning should be meaningful, challenging and fun, are shared by a dedicated team of governors, senior leaders and staff, likewise your fervent commitment to ensure that pupils understand and respect the diverse nature of the society in which they live. These features were abundantly evident during my visit, as was the loving and caring 'family culture' about which parents and pupils spoke. The school's mission statement, including that pupils 'have life and have it to the full', is tangible.

The pupils I spoke to during my visit were gushing in their praise for the school. Other than having more things to play with at lunchtime, pupils were hard-pressed to think of anything that might make the school better. Pupils were enthusiastic about the interesting lessons that teachers provide, with one commenting, 'Teachers help you learn in ways we might not even think about.' Pupils explained how teachers often use drama to help them understand people's feelings and motives, such as the character of Tim the Ostler in the poem 'The Highwayman'. Others spoke about taking part in debates and of different strategies they are

taught to help them learn more effectively, such as breaking problems down into steps, justifying their decisions and proving their answers.

Your regular checks and evaluations of the quality of teaching indicate that this aspect of provision has improved since the last inspection. Nonetheless, your commitment to continuous improvement maintains a spotlight on ensuring that pupils experience the best teaching possible. This was evident in your restructure of the support staff team to ensure that they become a highly qualified resource for staff and pupils. In addition, your visionary leadership has introduced an approach in which teachers examine, in depth, the processes of teaching and learning in order to improve them, including through coaching.

In the sample of lessons we visited, pupils were fully engaged in and enjoying their learning. They worked well together, sharing resources and discussing their ideas. Pupils also behaved very well at playtimes and in the dining hall. Older pupils showed a strong sense of maturity and responsibility in looking out for younger pupils. Those who had stayed indoors at playtime due to the wet weather behaved impeccably, playing board games and chatting sociably to each other.

At the last inspection the school was asked to improve pupils' presentation of work. Your introduction of a whole-school approach to handwriting has addressed this recommendation well. Inspectors also recommended that pupils at key stage 1 develop a better understanding of what they read. Since that time, staff training has successfully focused on further developing pupils' vocabulary and comprehension skills. As a result, there have been improvements to reading at both key stages. You are aware, however, that more work is needed to improve boys' reading by the end of Year 2.

The school's strengths are numerous and substantial, including leaders' accurate evaluation of why the school is not outstanding. Pupils in key stage 1 build well on their earlier attainment at the end of the Reception Year. However, the gender gaps evident in boys' and girls' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics when they begin school have not diminished enough by the end of Year 2.

Governors have the skills and experience to undertake their roles effectively. They analyse information about pupils' achievement and meet with pupils and staff. Governors visit the school regularly to check on different aspects of its work. This enables governors to challenge you and other leaders about how well the pupils' outcomes are improving and how well the culture of the school is demonstrating the agreed vision and core values. Governors are outward-looking and preparing a strategic improvement plan for the next three years to ensure the school's continued success.

Leaders use a range of successful strategies to communicate with parents, whose views are regularly sought and acted upon. Most parents are highly satisfied with the level of communication from the school and very appreciative of the quality of education and care the school provides.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

A key line of enquiry for my visit was to explore how the school kept pupils safe. I found that you have ensured rigorous procedures to keep pupils safe, which take full account of national legislation and guidance. All staff are vetted to confirm their suitability to work with children. Regular staff training ensures that staff are repeatedly reminded of the need to be vigilant and of the processes to follow if they are concerned about a pupil's safety. You are unrelenting in pursuing support and intervention from professional agencies, where necessary, to protect pupils' safety and well-being. Record-keeping is thorough. Leaders' investigations into any allegations of bullying or prejudicial behaviour are detailed.

Governors have introduced an internationally recognised scheme to teach children directly about how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of abuse. Governors are also acutely aware of their responsibility to protect pupils from the dangers of extremist views and radicalisation. They and staff have received training in this aspect of safeguarding and ensure that pupils have an appropriate insight into pertinent media issues.

The pupils I spoke to said that they feel safe in school. One said, 'Our teachers have said that we can tell them anything we are worried about, and we appreciate that.'

## **Inspection findings**

- A key line of enquiry was how quickly the school identifies pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This was because the school's performance data indicated that some pupils' special educational needs had only been identified in Year 2. You had prioritised earlier identification of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities last year. This was because, despite substantial resources being allocated to support the learning of this group of pupils in Reception and Year 1, the impact was not always good enough. In response, you made some significant changes to the staffing structure. You also sought specialised professional advice to ensure that where pupils had complex needs, these were accurately identified so that tailored support could be provided. The measures you have taken are working well. Moreover, governors' continued investment in this aspect of provision has enabled some innovative practice in the form of the school's 'Tripod'. This is a dedicated learning base where some pupils benefit from specialist teaching throughout each morning. Pupils follow bespoke learning programmes that address their complex learning needs. The school's performance data shows that across the school, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well. The adjustments you have made to the school's assessment system also now better reflect the small but important steps in progress of pupils whose needs are complex.
- Another focus for this inspection was the differing achievement of boys and girls at the end of Year 2. Gender differences were evident in the 2016 end of Year 2 assessments. These showed that boys attained less well than girls, and boys

nationally in reading and writing. Similarly, while girls attained above average standards in reading and writing, their standards in mathematics were below average and below that of boys. Reducing gender differences in achievement is a school priority that began last year. You had some notable success in reducing gender differences in achievement by the end of key stage 2, particularly in writing. The impact of the school's work was evident in the 2016 Year 6 test results, which did not show any significant gender differences in achievement. During my visit it was clear that you and your staff are working diligently to reduce differences in boys' and girls' achievement by the end of Year 2. I saw some impressive evidence of how teachers are improving boys' motivation to write in different subjects, and examples of good-quality writing from boys. For instance, writing riddles, explanations about fidget-spinners and recording the outcomes of mathematics tasks. The boys who read to me also had very positive attitudes towards reading. They used phonics effectively and had a good understanding of what they had read. There were no obvious underachievement indicators in girls' mathematics work. During our visits to lessons in the early years and key stage 1, girls were fully involved and enjoying mathematics activities. Despite these signs of improvement, the school's own assessment information shows that there is still a job to be done to diminish gender differences in these subjects by the end of key stage 1.

- Another focus for the inspection was the schools' curriculum. This continues to provide pupils with a rich and broad range of learning experiences. Providing pupils with plenty of 'hands on' learning is a key feature of the curriculum. Whether it be applying mathematical ideas to the construction of monuments with toothpicks and marshmallows, debating deforestation, hatching duck eggs or waving goodbye to butterflies that pupils have raised since eggs, the curriculum at Whittle-Le-Woods gives pupils a real thirst for learning. When designing topics teachers take good account of pupils' views and interests and capably plan for the development of key skills, including thinking skills. As a result, pupils develop these skills progressively as they get older and learn to apply what they have learned in different situations.
- Teachers' regular assessments of pupils' standards in the whole range of subjects they study give leaders a comprehensive picture of pupils' strong progress across the curriculum. By the end of Year 6, progress in reading is in line with pupils nationally and progress in writing and mathematics is well above average. Pupils attain above average standards in reading and well above average standards in writing and mathematics. The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are challenged and achieve well. Pupils with particular talents, for example in gymnastics, art and music, are nurtured and receive enrichment opportunities to develop their skills further. Parents and pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities. While some parents are not entirely satisfied with homework, the pupils I spoke to were wholly positive, explaining that teachers try hard to give them interesting things to do. Other major strengths within the curriculum are the extent to which it develops pupils spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Alongside Christian values, pupils develop a good understanding of fundamental British values and learn to value and respect all aspects of diversity.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the differences between boys' and girls' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 diminish.

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

Margot D'Arcy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss leaders' evaluations of the school's work and priorities for improvement. We visited a sample of lessons to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and as they moved around the school. I met with a group of 10 pupils from Years 2 to 6 to discuss their views and experiences of the school and spoke to other pupils informally at breaktimes. I listened to some pupils read and reviewed a sample of pupils' work. I had a discussion with five governors and met with a representative of Lancashire local authority. I reviewed a range of documentation, including that pertaining to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, assessment and leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning. I met with four members of the parent forum and considered 38 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, including 21 written comments. I took account of a recent survey conducted by the school to which 86 parents responded.