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Mrs Carolyn Ranson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ranson

Short inspection of Cuerden Church School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 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. Groups of parents, pupils and governors spoken to during the inspection recognise the improvements that you, your leadership team and staff have made to the school. Your self-evaluation judges the school accurately to be good. Governors and the local authority adviser confirm that the school has continued to improve under your committed and determined leadership. The school now has a vast range of strengths. This includes strengths in relation to pupils' behaviour and welfare.

You, along with your leadership team and governors, aim to nurture faith and inspire success for all pupils at Cuerden Church School. As a result, there is a welcoming and warm feel to the school, with strong relationships between staff and pupils. There is a real 'family' ethos. Leaders are determined to provide the highest quality education and, through their knowledge of each pupil, recognise when further support is required to ensure that pupils achieve well. The learning environment is purposeful, calm and respectful. Pupils' behaviour is good and they are polite and well mannered. Parents feel that the school is really adept at both the nurturing and academic aspects of education. Parents say that it provides 'everything you want from a school – a strong church school community'. Parents are also delighted with the support offered to pupils transferring from pre-schools into the Reception class and from other schools during the school year. A number of parents stated that the

school is 'exceptional', and one added that 'just when I think it can't get any better, it does!'

Since the last inspection, your leadership team has reviewed your assessment procedures. You now use a comprehensive system that has been developed and shared with all staff. Leaders use the information recorded in this purposeful assessment system to identify individual pupils' learning needs and secure stronger progress. Based on the assessment information that they have about their pupils, teachers devise appropriate learning activities swiftly and effectively to address misconceptions and meet the needs of their pupils. Consequently, no child is allowed to fall behind. As a result, current pupils are on track to improve on last year's end-of-key-stage results. An increase is expected in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards by the end of key stage 2. In early years, leaders also expect the number of children achieving age-related expectations to increase.

Pupils stated that they enjoy the fun way that teachers plan lessons. Parents and pupils value the range and variety of extra-curricular activities. These include residential visits, trips and various sports and music clubs.

Governors are sensitive to the needs of the local community and the backgrounds of families. They are determined to offer the best education possible to the school's pupils. The governing body's strategic role is now informed by an improved understanding of pupil attainment and progress data. They have improved the early years outdoor provision and increased staffing ratios in key stage 1 classes. Both of these decisions have had a positive effect on improving provision and pupil outcomes.

You and your team have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement since the last inspection. Leaders provide a wide range of experiences and trips which inspire pupils to write. Most pupils are now attaining higher standards. Their writing continues to improve as a result of effective teaching which combines pupils' interests and teachers' high expectations. The majority of pupils have improved the quality, and increased the quantity, of their writing. Evidence of improved writing can be seen right across the curriculum. However, leaders rightly recognise that the quality of writing still remains inconsistent across key stage 2 classes.

In the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching to ensure that it is better matched to the pupils' abilities. You were also asked to provide clear feedback to pupils to help them improve their work. Pupils described a variety of ways that teachers help them get better at their work. They said teachers 'encourage, help and support' them with their work. Older pupils talked with pride about learning something new where their teacher has 'explained or asked questions to help you, without telling you the answer'. As a result of these improvements, pupils have clearly developed their writing skills, for example by including more imaginative words to add interest or atmosphere. The school's assessment and tracking procedures also support teachers in ensuring that the level of challenge or support is well matched to identified learning needs.

Leaders have improved teaching and learning in the early years by refurbishing the outdoor area to give all children, especially boys, better access to the different areas of learning. The teaching of phonics is particularly effective in the Reception class. Phonics is included in continuous provision to allow children to revisit the sounds and blends learned. In other years, however, children are not challenged sufficiently to apply their phonics knowledge to reading and spelling.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors fulfil statutory requirements when appointing new members of staff.

Parents and pupils feel that the school is a safe place to be. Leaders, including governors, ensure that staff receive high-quality training. As a result, staff know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff are very clear about the school's procedures for reporting and recording any concerns that they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Leaders are tenacious in their work to protect vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are taught about how to stay safe and keep themselves safe. Leaders have introduced and implemented clear programmes to teach pupils about personal and internet safety.

Attendance rates of all pupils, and groups of pupils, are currently in line with, or close to, national averages. Leaders have implemented very good procedures to tackle the small numbers of pupils who are regularly absent from school. Records show the positive effect that these are having on improving overall attendance. Leaders take their responsibility very seriously for pupils being safe and attending school regularly.

Inspection findings

- Children enter Cuerden Church School from a variety of pre-school settings with attainment which is typically below age-related expectations. Good-quality teaching enables the differences between the school's attainment figures and national attainment figures to begin to diminish by the end of the early years foundation stage. In 2016, results from the Year 1 phonics screening check dipped. Leaders have, however, addressed this with some urgency. By the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. During key stage 2, pupils make good progress in reading and writing, and significantly better progress in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make equally good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is exemplary. Pupils' impeccable conduct in lessons ensures that they are on task and engaged. This focus allows pupils to produce work of an improving quality. There is an increasing number of opportunities for pupils to develop responsibility and

leadership. Pupils elect members of the school council and there are also active contributions from pupils through class assemblies.

- The first key line of enquiry during the inspection considered how teaching and learning challenged key stage 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics to achieve greater depth in their learning. The school's own information shows that an increasing proportion of pupils are now attaining those levels expected of them at this stage of the school year. An increasing proportion of pupils are also exceeding expectations. Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress and attaining particularly well, due to high-quality teaching and targeted academic, social and emotional support. Leaders meet half-termly with teachers to identify any pupils where progress and attainment are not meeting leaders' expectations. Support for underachieving pupils is arranged swiftly. Teaching programmes are well matched to support identified learning needs and the majority of pupils make good progress.
- Year 6 pupils read with confidence. They have good word-attack skills and use these appropriately to understand texts. Their comprehension skills are secure and they read with good intonation. Their inference and information retrieval skills are well developed, enabling them to have a good understanding of comprehension. They can also make appropriate predictions based on what they have already read.
- The best teaching of writing occurs where teachers adhere to school procedures and where teachers involve parents in the writing process. Homework is used well to encourage pupils to plan their writing in detail. The finished pieces of writing are shared with parents on completion. High expectations of pupils results in writing which is imaginative and well crafted. Sentence structures are varied and interesting description is used to engage the reader. In Year 6, pupils select words deliberately for effect. One pupil's sentence, 'It was a hidden duplicate of the first obnoxious doll shop,' is typical of the standard of work seen among the most able pupils. A Year 4 pupil writing to persuade visitors to Beacon Fell, wrote: '...is a perfect place for all the family. Experience some tranquil, unimaginable views to relax and look at the essence of wildlife.' However, this quality is not consistent across the four classes. As a result, some pupils' writing contains weaker word choices in relation to their abilities and evidence of inconsistent application of phonics to spellings.
- Pupils' mathematics work shows their increasing ability to manipulate numbers and fractions when carrying out calculations. Pupils' reasoning skills are developing through various challenges and activities. Pupils' books show an ever-improving understanding of the relationships between the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division), and across different mathematical concepts.
- A second line of enquiry investigated how well teaching enabled boys in the early years foundation stage and Year 1 to meet the requirements of the early years foundation stage profile and the Year 1 phonics screening check.
- The Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms are language-rich environments, offering pupils lots of opportunities to practise their spoken language. Pupils of all

ages speak confidently and the most able pupils consistently speak in whole sentences. Leaders assess children's language acquisition on entry into the Reception class. Teachers do this as their initial observations and analysis of assessments suggest that this is a key area of weakness in children's pre-school development. This robust assessment leads to well-tailored programmes which meet individuals' needs. It also allows children to acquire and practise language swiftly and make good progress from their starting points. The teaching of phonics is strong and well matched to children's development.

- School tracking of assessments shows that increased numbers of pupils are meeting the school's expected standards at this stage of the school year. Leaders presented clear evidence through their monitoring of pupils' progress, improved teaching and a better awareness of the requirements of the Year 1 phonics check, that standards will be higher this year when compared to last year.
- While pupils in Year 1 have well-developed phonic skills, these are not applied consistently to their reading or writing. Year 1 boys read with little expression, focusing on the individual words and sounds. Middle-ability and the least able boys were unable to recognise blends taught to younger pupils in their reading books.
- The third line of enquiry considered how well provision and teaching in the early years enabled boys to meet expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a well-planned and cohesive range of activities to promote children's, including boys', all-round development. Teaching provision across the early years, including adult-led and continuous provision, is well matched to children's interests and needs. Governors' strategic decision to employ additional staff during the morning to support children's language and mathematical development has been an important element in raising standards, along with the high quality of teaching.
- School monitoring shows the positive impact of the outdoor area on children's confidence, imaginative and creative play, their self-awareness and independence. Boys' development has improved considerably in all areas, due to the impact of the outdoor environment. Children's books show strong progress in aspects of reading, writing and number over time. Clear assessments, through observations and records, ensure that children are consistently challenged or supported to do their best. Current attainment information shows that increasing numbers of children are attaining the high standards that their teachers expect of them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the best-quality teaching seen in some classes is shared across key stage 2 to challenge all pupils to reach the highest standards in writing
- they build on the good-quality teaching in the early years to enable pupils to apply their phonics knowledge better to reading and spelling in subsequent years.

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

Ian Shackleton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team, parents and six members of the governing body and I spoke with a representative of the local authority. In addition, I talked with small groups of pupils around the school, in lessons and formally.

I jointly observed teaching and learning in various classes with the headteacher and scrutinised writing, mathematics and topic books from pupils across the school. In addition, I listened to pupils read.

I examined and discussed a range of documents, including those relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. I looked at the school's own self-evaluation of how well it is doing, the school's improvement priorities and the school's assessment information. I reviewed the school's website.

I considered the views expressed by parents through informal meetings and the 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) as well as comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View.