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Mr Paul Hudson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hudson

Short inspection of Duddon St Peter's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Well-judged actions and a clear focus have been effective in raising achievement since the previous inspection. You have developed a strong and caring team where the school's values are at the heart of everyone's work. Together with staff and governors, you are firmly committed to making sure that pupils at Duddon St Peter's have the opportunity to 'be the best they can be'. Pupils know they are valued and appreciate the many rewards they receive that recognise personal qualities as well as achievements in their learning. Pupils are very proud of their school and told me that they particularly enjoy the fun they have in lessons and the opportunities to use the exciting outdoor spaces.

A talented group of governors led by a highly effective chair offers strong support to the leadership of the school. Governors have a good strategic overview and are accurate in their assessments of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They know the school very well. They are supportive and proud of all that has been achieved and challenge leaders to make continued improvements.

Parents also appreciate your work and 100% of those who responded to the Ofsted survey on Parent View say that their children are happy in school. Typically, comments include, 'I feel very lucky to have such peace of mind, knowing my child's learning needs are well catered for by a wonderful team of dedicated staff.'

At the last inspection in 2013, you were asked to provide more opportunities for pupils in key stage 1 to write at length and reach higher levels in their work. Pupils' books show that you have been successful in this area. English leaders have introduced new strategies to support pupils with their writing. Staff have been trained in how to teach pupils to talk through their thinking and rehearse their vocabulary before starting to write. In 2016, standards in writing were above average by the end of key stage 1. However, in key stage 2, standards in writing were below average. You have worked hard to improve on this but you have more still to do.

You were also asked to improve the effectiveness of the questions that teachers asked to help develop pupils' thinking. You have supported teachers to use questions to assess pupils' understanding and extend their learning. This good practice was evident during several lessons I observed, including an English lesson. Skilled questioning by a teacher encouraged pupils to think deeply about the characters that authors create and how they evoke atmosphere with their writing. Pupils were challenged to write with flair and emotion.

Finally, you were required to develop the roles of middle leaders in order to raise the quality of teaching to outstanding. Middle leaders are having a much greater impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning in several subjects and are required to report their progress to governors each term. For example, in science pupils achieve well across the school and reach high standards at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Able subject leaders have successfully developed an exciting curriculum that promotes good learning. They make full use of the school's excellent grounds, including the sensory garden and wildlife areas. They provide training and support, not only to staff in school but to teachers in other schools in the North West. The work of these leaders has been recognised with the highest award of Gold Standard by the Primary Science Quality Mark.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders take their responsibility with regard to safeguarding very seriously. The governors and leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and fit for purpose. Appropriate statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Records for all aspects of safeguarding are detailed and of high quality. Staff are well trained in child protection and understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

The very caring relationships that have been established between staff and pupils mean that pupils feel safe and happy. Pupils say that incidences of bullying are very rare. They have confidence that adults in school will help them if they have a problem and they know that it will be dealt with quickly. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Visits from the police and fire service reinforce the school's work. A caring culture is further developed by older pupils being given responsibility for younger ones through a 'buddy system'.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I focused on several key lines of enquiry. First, I wanted to know why some pupils do not reach the expected standards in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in Year 1. Your plans for improvement show that you have recognised that standards need to be raised and recently you introduced a more structured approach to the teaching of phonics that includes Nursery and Reception children. The teaching of phonics has improved and pupils are gaining confidence in the use of their phonics knowledge. However, some of the strategies are not yet securely established and the teaching of phonics is not always consistent. When adults' knowledge of phonics is weaker, pupils' progress slows.
- For the second focus, I wanted to know why girls did not appear to make as much progress as boys with their reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 1. The published data for the school shows that girls have lagged behind in these subjects for the last three years. You explained that there were very few girls in some year groups. You know that in a small school like Duddon St Peter's, even one pupil can make a big difference to the results. This means that the published data has to be treated with caution and does not always give an accurate picture. Nevertheless, you do not use this as an excuse and take action to tackle any concerns. Extra support is given to pupils who fall behind, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and they are making good progress as a result. The school's own data and work in pupils' books show that the differences between boys and girls in some year groups are not typical across the school.
- Third, I considered why the high standards reached in reading at the end of key stage 2 were not replicated in mathematics and writing. In reading, pupils in Duddon St Peter's regularly perform better than other pupils nationally and last year their performance was in the top 10% of schools. For writing and mathematics, the standard reached was below average in 2016. You have taken effective actions to improve the teaching of mathematics. Staff received additional training and there are now more opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning skills and apply their mathematical knowledge by solving problems. These actions, together with useful information evenings to engage parents and a reward scheme to encourage pupils to learn their tables, have significantly strengthened the progress that pupils make. Work in pupils' books confirms the school's own assessments that pupils are making good progress in mathematics across all year groups.
- Writing is also improving and, as pupils move through key stage 2, their understanding of text structure and plot development progresses. Pupils discuss their approaches with enthusiasm and believe that their writing is getting better. However, some pupils show weaknesses in their understanding of spelling patterns, with too many spelling errors being repeated. This shows that some pupils are not learning from their mistakes. Pupils do not always transfer the writing skills they are taught in English lessons to other subjects, with some books showing handwriting and punctuation deteriorating.
- A further line of enquiry was to investigate why the attendance of pupils in your

school is lower than for other schools nationally. Your work with parents to improve punctuality and encourage them to take holidays outside term time has mostly been successful. It is clear from the detailed information about each pupil that many of their absences result from valid medical needs and a small number of pupils with complex health problems sometimes require time off school. When this is taken into account, attendance is almost average.

- Finally, I looked in detail at the information published on the school's website. Some improvements are needed to ensure that all of the required details are included so that parents and others have easy access to the information they may need. These details include providing more information about how the curriculum is taught in school and the content to be delivered. Also, the school's published plans for the use of the pupil premium and the physical education and sport premium do not give enough detail to show the impact of the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics is strengthened so that a higher number of pupils reach the standards expected of them in Year 1
- they further raise progress and attainment in writing in key stage 2 by strengthening the teaching of spelling and handwriting
- the school's website includes all of the required details so that parents and others have easy access to the information they may need.

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 Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Parkinson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out observations of learning in all year groups. Four of these were joint observations with the headteacher. Along with subject leaders, I also looked at pupils' work in books. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, minutes of meetings of the governing body, behaviour logs and records connected with the safeguarding of pupils. I held discussions with parents, members of staff, governors and a

representative from the local authority. I listened to pupils read. I evaluated 48 responses received through 'Parent View' (Ofsted's online survey) and 13 responses received through the online staff survey. I also took account of the views of pupils whom I spoke to in school.