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Mrs Emma Fenton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fenton

Short inspection of Halebank CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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. Pupils behave well and attend school regularly. There is great pride in the school; it is well respected in the local community.

Parents and pupils say that they like all the opportunities school provides: the many visits to places of interest, theatrical performances and, most recently, parents coming in to read 'bed-time stories' with their children.

You have quickly been accepted as the leader of this school due to your calm, confident, inclusive and decisive manner. One parent commented: 'I feel our school has come on in leaps and bounds since our new headteacher was appointed. I can only see a better future ahead with Mrs Fenton leading the way!'

Since your appointment in January, you have made significant improvements to the curriculum, outcomes and safeguarding. You have a very good understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school and clear plans to tackle areas that do not meet your high expectations.

Leaders and governors have responded well to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The standard of writing across the curriculum has improved. There are many examples of very good-quality writing in English and topic books. Teachers follow the school's marking scheme to good effect.

The most able pupils are making better progress due to a more challenging curriculum in English. This year, one quarter of the cohort achieved a high standard in reading. However, in mathematics, there is not the same level of challenge evident and the curriculum is not as engaging. As a result, pupils, particularly the most able pupils, do not make consistently good progress in this subject.

Safeguarding is effective.

The single central record meets requirements. All staff have regular child protection training. There are very few open cases of child protection, but nevertheless, you expect the highest standards for the most vulnerable pupils and ensure that where you feel other agencies are not reacting quickly enough to your concerns, you follow it up. Child protection records are kept securely. Your work is very detailed and thorough. All welfare requirements are met in the Reception class.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good and sometimes accelerated progress in reading due to a highly effective whole-school approach. You have transformed attitudes to reading, particularly for boys, by investing in books to capture pupils' interest. You have created a beautiful library and each classroom has its own bright and enticing reading space. The teaching of reading is highly inclusive and very effective. I listened to some boys read, and they did so confidently and fluently with good comprehension skills.
- The teaching of phonics has improved. I observed Year 1 and Year 2 pupils being taught by your Reception teacher. She had a lovely manner with pupils; they were relaxed and thoroughly enjoyed their learning. They showed good subject knowledge by quickly recognising split digraphs and suffixes. Pupils made strong progress due to a rapid, fun and highly engaging session. They could not wait to show the teacher when they had worked out how to accurately add 'ing' to a word.
- Boys' progress has improved. There are such variable numbers of girls and boys in a year group that we cannot accurately compare the achievements of boys and girls year on year. In all of my lesson observations, across year groups, in the scrutiny of pupils' work and listening to readers, it is clear that boys are now making good progress.
- You rightly recognise that mathematics is now the key area for development in this school. Many pupils make good progress in aspects of mathematics such as shape, space and measure and basic calculations. However, extensive scrutiny of pupils' work coupled with lesson observations show that the curriculum does not always capture pupils' interest and does not provide consistently high challenge for the most able pupils, particularly around problem solving.

- The local authority, diocese and governing body have worked highly effectively to bring about an innovative and successful solution to the challenges of an ever-decreasing school budget in a small school. They have formed a collaboration with a much larger school where you are the deputy headteacher. You spend half of the week at the local school where you are permanently employed and the other half as the interim headteacher of this school.
- Governors have built good capacity for further improvement through your appointment and the appointment of a deputy headteacher to support you. Parents and pupils feel that this arrangement is working well. They are clearly right. The school has kept its autonomy, and small and friendly identity while receiving all the benefits of sharing resources and expertise with a much larger school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve achievement in mathematics by providing a more engaging curriculum and consistently high level of challenge for the most able pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and a representative from the local authority. I also met with members of the governing body. I spoke with a range of pupils in lessons and at social times. I scrutinised a range of workbooks across a variety of subjects and year groups. I looked at the school's website and analysed the school self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I analysed the school's record of checks made on the suitability of staff, records of child protection and staff training. I also discussed other aspects of safeguarding with you. I spoke with parents in the playground at the beginning of the school day and considered 13 free-text responses and 20 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I considered eight responses to the staff questionnaire.