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Miss Lynda Brown
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Dear Miss Brown

Short inspection of Bolshaw Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The very caring and calm ethos that is at the heart of Bolshaw Primary is tangible throughout the school. You have created an environment that has the well-being of pupils and staff at its core. This means that pupils flourish and staff feel proud to work at the school. You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher, with whom you form a very effective senior leadership team.

This is a truly inclusive school where all pupils are valued as individuals. You and your staff know your pupils very well and are able to meet their specific needs. This enables them to thrive. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are welcomed. In this very nurturing environment these pupils make great progress in their learning and development. You ensure that everyone in the school celebrates diversity. Valuing people's differences, whether in sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or religion, is what brings you together as an inclusive community.

Over recent years you have faced significant challenges related to staffing. There have been a very high number of staff taking maternity leave, and some absences on health grounds. This has not only affected the quality of teaching but also leadership capacity within the school. It is a credit to your leadership that within this context, pupils have continued to achieve good standards.

During this period of staffing turbulence you have continued to receive the support of the majority of parents. Those who spoke with the inspector at the start of the day, and those who attended the open morning on the day of the inspection, were extremely positive about the school. Many of the parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire spoke of how happy their children are at Bolshaw and are full of praise for the school's family ethos. One comment summed up these positive views: 'We honestly could not be happier with the school – leaders, teachers, classroom assistants, lunchtime organisers all – everybody works together as an efficient, effective and amazing team!' However, some parents did express concerns related to the staff changes, and they were dissatisfied with the way information has been communicated to them. You are aware that you could do more to ensure that all parents are happy with the way you communicate with them. Indeed, recently, members of the 'parents' forum' have been looking at how this can be improved.

All pupils who spoke to me were extremely positive about their school. They talk about their learning with enthusiasm. They speak highly of their teachers, whose support they value. Pupils really appreciate the way that their teachers try to make their learning fun and engaging. They feel that their work is challenging, but not so difficult that they become frustrated. As one pupil said: 'Maths is really hard but fun to do.'

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that all is consistently good and more is outstanding. The instability in staffing has hindered the work that you have done in this area. That said, you believe that the overall quality of teaching is better now than at the previous inspection. The standards that pupils have achieved over the last three years support this. You are looking forward to starting the new academic year with a full complement of permanent staff and all senior and middle leaders in place.

You were asked to ensure that pupils made faster progress, particularly in their writing. You were also asked to make sure that the most able pupils were challenged to make good or outstanding progress. Since the last inspection, you have given writing a higher profile across the school. Pupils are fully engaged in purposeful writing activities that are often linked to reading and drama activities. Pupils clearly enjoy these writing activities, which help them to make good progress. As one pupil stated when she explained why she loves writing stories: 'You can just let your imagination go wild.' The standards that the most able pupils achieve in writing, reading and mathematics show that teachers are challenging them to achieve their potential.

Following the last inspection, you sharpened the way that you check whether your actions are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Governors are also much better now at asking searching questions that help you to evaluate the effectiveness of your actions.

Pupils at Bolshaw Primary feel safe, valued and happy, which helps them to learn more effectively. It is therefore a shame that some disadvantaged pupils and some

who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are missing out on this experience by not attending school regularly. Alongside governors and staff in school, you are working resolutely to improve the attendance rates of these pupils. You are aware that this remains an area for further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in your school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, including protocols and practices for record-keeping. Systems to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to work with children in the school are secure.

You and your staff know your pupils and their families extremely well. This, coupled with the training that staff receive, means that you are all well placed to spot any signs or symptoms of potential risk or abuse. The school learning mentor is the linchpin of all the work that you do to safeguard your pupils.

Pupils feel that all the adults in the school look after them well and care about them. Pupils know that if they are worried about anything they can talk to any member of staff, and they are confident that adults in school will help them. This is summed up in one pupil's comment: 'If I have a problem I know that there is always someone I can talk to.'

You are very keen to ensure that parents, as well as pupils, are alert to any potential risks when using the internet. During the inspection, a number of parents attended a presentation on online safety. The evaluations of this event were all very positive, with parents stating that they had found it valuable and informative.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which related to the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Over the last three years, too many of these pupils have not been attending school regularly. You and the learning mentor have identified the different reasons why these pupils have a high absence rate and are working closely with parents to improve their children's attendance. There has been a slight improvement this year in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, but this still remains approximately 1.5% below the national average. This year, the attendance of the small group of pupils who have an education, health and care plan has improved significantly and is now in line with the national average. A similar improvement has not been seen for the pupils who receive other support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. I am convinced that you will not waver in your determination to do everything that you can to encourage pupils with a high absence rate to attend school regularly.
- In 2016, the proportion of middle-ability pupils who attained the expected standard in writing at the end of key stage 1 was below the national average. Consequently, I was interested to find out whether middle-ability pupils were

being challenged enough to make the best possible progress in this subject, particularly as writing had been an area for improvement at the last inspection. The overall proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in writing this year has improved on last year and is now above the national average. However, a small group of middle-ability pupils did not make good progress from their starting points. We discussed how these pupils had been particularly affected by the instability in staffing throughout last year. From September, you have ensured that this class will benefit from high-quality teaching and you are confident that they will make rapid progress in order to achieve the expected standard at the end of key stage 2.

- Since the last inspection, you have focused on ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress in their writing. The standards that pupils achieved at the end of key stage 2 show that you have been successful in this aim. In 2016 and 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard has been above the national average. The proportion of those working at greater depth is particularly impressive. There is real excitement in the way you approach writing across the year groups. Pupils respond positively to the way writing activities are linked to oral work, drama and reading.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at Bolshaw is small compared to the national average. I was interested to find out how effectively you use the pupil premium funding to help them to achieve their potential. You and other staff know each of these pupils extremely well and have a clear understanding of the barriers to learning that they face. Consequently, you are able to support each pupil in a personalised way. As a result, they make good progress during their time in school.
- My final line of enquiry related to how effectively leaders and governors check that their actions are having the desired impact. This was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Leaders are now much more focused on evaluating whether specific actions are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. For example, you monitor closely how you are spending the pupil premium funding. This enables you to identify the strategies that are working and those that are not. You explained how if one-to-one sessions are not helping pupils to make progress then you will look at alternative strategies.
- Following the last inspection, governors acknowledged that they had not been challenging leaders enough and had been too willing just to accept the information that you presented to them. They have now become more skilled at monitoring and evaluating the impact of leaders' actions. Agendas for meetings are now based around critical questioning related to the quality of teaching and the impact that this has on pupils' progress. Governors describe themselves as being on a 'development journey'. Some members of the governing body are relatively new appointments. However, although they are still inexperienced in the role, they demonstrate a real commitment to the school and a willingness to develop their strategic leadership skills. The vice-chair of the governing body possesses the required skills and expertise to provide you with valuable support and challenge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take advantage of the return to a full complement of permanent teaching staff from September so that all pupils benefit from consistently good teaching
- they continue to take action to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- all parents are satisfied with the way that the school communicates with them.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher; three members of the governing body, including the vice-chair; and a representative of the local authority. I met formally with three groups of pupils and talked informally with others at playtime and in lessons. I listened to pupils read. I also talked with parents informally at the start of the school day and during the open morning that was taking place during the inspection. Accompanied by you, I observed teaching and learning across the school. I examined your self-evaluation document. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered the responses to Ofsted's Parent View; responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text; and responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.