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Mrs Cathy Thomas
Headteacher
Ellel St John the Evangelist Church of England Primary School
Chapel Street
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Dear Mrs Thomas

Short inspection of Ellel St John the Evangelist Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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. School leaders have recently faced a number of challenges and difficult decisions. They have responded to these effectively and always made sure that pupils and their interests are at the centre of the school's work. You have had changes to senior leadership and in the way teaching assistant support is provided. In addition, you had to respond to the increasing number of young children locally by expanding your Reception intake to two classes for this school year. These changes have been undertaken in a positive and forward-thinking way. For example, the changes to support for pupils have allowed you to build closer partnerships between the teachers and teaching assistants working with separate classes.

Leaders and staff have a positive and friendly approach to each other, parents and pupils. Pupils get along happily together and are polite towards adults. In addition, adults have strong respect for the pupils they work with. The school is a close and caring community. You expect all aspects of the school's work to be underpinned by its strong Christian ethos. At the same time, you ensure that the school is open and welcoming to people of all backgrounds. This is particularly important because the school has pupils of a wide range of nationalities, often from families associated with the University of Lancaster. Pupils told me how they quickly make friends with pupils from abroad who may stay for a relatively short time and then keep in touch

using electronic communication.

You have a detailed and honest view of the many strengths of the school and the aspects which can be developed further. The school improvement plan accurately identifies key priorities and provides sensible steps to help the team of staff and governors address these. Your continuing review of pupils' outcomes has shown you that boys' achievement is sometimes less than girls'.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to consider how you could improve the quality of teaching and improve pupils' achievement, for example by teachers making sure that they set work to meet pupils' needs and use questions skilfully to support pupils' learning. Senior leaders now carefully monitor how well teaching helps pupils to learn. Teachers use the information you all gather about pupils' ongoing progress to adjust their teaching and so make sure that pupils are stretched. When needed, the school provides closely targeted support to small groups of pupils and individuals. The strong relationships between teachers and pupils mean that pupils are confident to answer the questions teachers ask.

The parents I spoke with and who responded to Ofsted's Parent View question were highly positive about the school and its leadership. All who responded would recommend the school to others. Parents' additional comments to me emphasised just how much confidence they have that the school is doing a good job for their children. One opinion reflected the views of others, 'A great little school, my children are happy and well looked after. There is a wonderful feeling of community.' Similarly, the pupils and staff who completed their questionnaires recognised how well the school works.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors give a high priority to safeguarding pupils. They make thorough arrangements to do this. The school's child protection and safeguarding policy is closely matched to the latest national and local authority guidance and is available on the school's website. You provide annual training for staff in safeguarding so that they keep up to date. You told me about some of the extra steps you take to make sure that pupils with particularly challenging circumstances remain safe. The evidence I collected confirms that the school has a strong culture of looking after pupils and keeping them safe.

A small committee of governors keeps a close oversight of safeguarding. This committee organised a thorough review of all aspects of safeguarding in 2016 to check that all requirements were being met.

Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They know about how to keep themselves safe when they use computers and understand the agreed use policy for computers, which they sign. Pupils' awareness of safety and managing risk is increased by their outdoor education experiences.

Inspection findings

- You work closely in partnership with the deputy headteacher and the whole staff team to make sure that everyone knows precisely what they need to do to become even better. Governors provide good levels of support but are also fully prepared to challenge weaker practice so that they are convinced that only the best is being offered. The school's recent accreditation of its programme for outdoor and environmental learning indicates how you aim to provide the best possible learning experiences for pupils. The school's success in implementing such initiatives indicates that the school has proven capacity to develop further.
- You told me that you were disappointed by the academic outcomes that some pupils had achieved in 2016. However, you also explained how you carefully analysed what had happened and responded to make sure that pupils' future learning was strengthened. Results in 2017 showed marked increases. You know that boys tend to do less well than girls, particularly in writing. To address this, you have introduced regular opportunities for pupils to produce high-quality pieces of writing on different interesting topics. This work has allowed you to see that pupils' writing, and boys' in particular, is improving.
- The school's curriculum is rich and varied. You make sure that proper weight is given to English and mathematics while recognising that other subjects and wider experiences have a vital place in ensuring that pupils receive a well-rounded education. I enjoyed talking with Year 3 pupils while sitting around a log fire during their outdoor learning. They were very clear that this kind of work helps them to learn how to look after themselves, others and the environment as well as having fun! You know that pupils' experiences in school have an impact on all aspects of their lives. The school has very recently installed a running track to provide even more opportunities to help pupils to stay healthy. Pupils talked to me with evident enthusiasm about how they enjoy using the new track.
- You and other senior leaders have a very clear understanding of where teaching in the school is most effective. I saw pupils engaging well in their learning across the school. For example, Year 4 pupils responded very well to the challenges set to solve an Ancient Egyptian murder during their work during part of the morning of the inspection. In the afternoon, this theme was followed up in the writing of a diary entry based on the experience of Howard Carter, who excavated Tutankhamun's tomb. The interest the teacher had created in the tasks set meant that pupils became engrossed and learned very quickly. Effective leadership of the changes to early years provision has ensured that children in the school make rapid progress.
- Pupils, overall, attend school regularly, with absence being as low as or lower than the national average. However, recently, some groups of pupils have had more absence than their peers. You considered why this was and identified a need to restate the school's clear expectations about attendance while also offering additional support to children who may have found it harder to attend as well as others. You explained to me how this work has been successful, with some pupils showing clear improvement to their attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to implement the planned strategies to reduce the differences between the achievement of boys and girls and leaders check closely to ensure that this happens.

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

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. I had discussions with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a representative of the local authority. I met with a group of pupils and talked with others around the school during lessons and break. I toured the school, accompanied by you. I observed teaching and learning in classes across the school and heard a small group of pupils read. I visited pupils undertaking learning activities in a woodland area. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' books. I examined documents including information about the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation document, the improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body and information about pupils' achievement. I considered 37 responses completed this school year to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 22 additional written responses. I spoke with some parents at the start of the school day and read a letter sent by a parent.