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Ms Alison Embleton
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Embleton

Short inspection of Christ Church CofE VA Junior School, Sowerby Bridge

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment as headteacher in September 2014, you have been relentless in your commitment to ensuring that pupils' best interests are placed very firmly at the centre of all decision-making. Your strong Christian values permeate the work of the school and you are determined that no child will be left behind. Staff value the clear guidance you give and such is the respect with which you are held that you have a strong and cohesive team around you, including governors. This makes you well placed to build on your current successes and to make further improvements.

You know that for pupils to be successful they need to feel happy and safe. You have worked tirelessly to create the conditions for learning that enable all pupils to thrive and be successful. Such is your commitment to promoting physical and mental well-being that you nurture strong and trusting relationships. You have promoted successfully a loving family atmosphere, in which staff and pupils flourish and are proud to be part of the Christ Church team. The majority of parents are equally supportive of your leadership. As one parent stated, 'The school goes above and beyond what they need to do to support me and my children.'

Pupils start school with skills that are below those typically expected for their age. Occasionally, pupils enter with skills that are significantly below those expected. You recognise the importance of developing ever closer links with your main feeder

infant school and especially the alignment of your assessment procedures. This is to strengthen further pupils' transition procedures and overcome the dip in pupils' achievement identified in your internal assessment information captured at the start of Year 3.

You have worked hard to ensure that assessment procedures in the school are accurate and thorough. This provides leaders, including governors, with a very clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses within pupils' achievement data. You were rightly disappointed in the provisional outcomes for mathematics in 2017 but did not make excuses. Instead you have analysed the results thoroughly and used this information to adjust your approaches to teaching and learning and to inform your school improvement priorities for the forthcoming year. Although you have already achieved much this term, your documentation does not reflect the quality of improvement work completed by leaders. This is because objectives in plans are not linked precisely to the gains in pupils' outcomes you desire, particularly the proportions of pupils you wish to reach the higher standards. You and governors agreed that this would make it easier for them to evaluate the impact of your actions thoroughly.

You set targets for pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics and use these to hold teachers to account effectively. You do not shy away from making difficult decisions when needed.

Such is the school's popularity that the school has grown in size since the last inspection and you now have five classes. You organise mixed-age classes skilfully to ensure that pupils' needs are well met.

You have addressed the areas for improvement indicated at the last inspection and have introduced a consistent approach to the successful teaching of spelling. As a result, pupils' average score is in line with the national average in the Year 6 tests. You also introduced a consistent handwriting style. This has considerably improved the presentation of pupils' work in a range of subjects, which is now exemplary. Historical data on pupils' outcomes in mathematics showed improvement to be in line with national averages. However, in 2016, the raised expectations of the new curriculum and new testing arrangements saw pupils' outcomes dip to below the national averages. You recognise there is still more work to do to fully secure pupils' mathematical problem solving and reasoning skills.

You were also asked to develop subject leadership, particularly in English and mathematics and you have done so effectively. Investment in high-quality training and well-considered external support has enabled you to develop a committed and knowledgeable leadership team. Although only small in number, together you have brought about significant improvements to the approaches you use for the teaching of writing and mathematics across the school. Detailed monitoring has ensured that your expectations are consistently met in all year groups. This is improving outcomes effectively for pupils currently in the school.

Governors share your commitment to ensure that the school continues to improve

and that pupils receive the very best learning experiences possible. They bring a range of skills and experiences to their roles and use their detailed knowledge of the community to offer appropriate levels of challenge and support to school leaders. They recognise their responsibilities towards raising pupils' achievement and pupils' aspirations. As one governor eloquently expressed, 'It is our role to ensure we hold doors open for our pupils.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on all aspects of safeguarding and have ensured that arrangements are fit for purpose. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of all staff and volunteers to work with children. You promote a strong culture of vigilance and early response to identified issues or concerns. You have well-established relationships with a range of professionals who are helping the school to keep pupils safe.

Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that they are up to date with the most recent and relevant legislation. All staff understand the responsibility they have in keeping children safe. A dedicated pastoral support worker ensures that the most vulnerable pupils and their families receive appropriate care and support.

Pupils say they are well looked after and know that there is always a trusted adult in whom they can confide. They conduct themselves in a friendly and orderly manner both inside the classrooms and around the school. Relationships are strong because pupils know that teachers have their best interests at heart. Pupils are positive learners and are keen to discuss their work with one another. As a result, pupils consider that their school is a safe and happy place.

Inspection findings

- A focus for the inspection was to determine if the quality of teaching in mathematics remained good. This was in light of the dip in pupils' outcomes in the national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2016, which were below the national average, and in the provisional pupils' outcomes in 2017. Together, with your subject leader, you have undertaken a thorough analysis of pupils' assessment information across all year groups. This indicated a weakness in pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. With the support of a mathematics specialist leader from a local teaching school alliance, you have introduced new schemes of work that give pupils increasing opportunities to practise their problem-solving and reasoning skills successfully. Teachers are now using their ongoing assessment information successfully to provide immediate intervention and support to those pupils who need it. This means that pupils currently in the school are making good progress from their starting points and standards are rising. However, you recognise there is still more to do, especially in promoting pupils' mental arithmetic agility and speedy recall of number facts.
- I also wanted to check boys' achievement, because historical assessment information indicates that they have performed less well than girls over several years, particularly in writing. This is no longer the case. I found that there is a

consistent approach to the teaching of writing that is securing improving outcomes effectively for boys and girls. You use carefully chosen texts to provide a stimulus for all pupils to want to write and promote writing across a range of subjects. Teachers are adept in giving pupils precise feedback that helps them to edit and improve the quality of their work successfully. At the same time, you have nurtured pupils' own assessment skills and built their resilience to both give and receive constructive criticism with peers.

- 'Junior leaders' are the pupils chosen from each class to join leaders in monitoring the quality of writing across the school. They are harsh critics and adept at giving insightful feedback. One junior leader expressed, 'One pupil's book that we reviewed showed that they had spelt a really long word correctly and a three letter word wrong. We need to focus!' As a result of the range of strategies you have undertaken, achievement in writing for pupils currently in the school, particularly boys, is strengthening. This is also reflective of the improvements seen in the provisional outcomes in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2017.
- A further focus for the inspection was to examine the actions leaders have taken to improve outcomes, particularly at the higher standards, for disadvantaged pupils, who account for over half of all pupils. I found that leaders, including governors, are fully aware of the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils and ensure that additional funds are used to enhance pupils' achievement effectively. Careful tracking of pupils' progress means that disadvantaged pupils receive timely additional support to ensure that they make the same good progress as their peers from their varied starting points. When this is not the case, it is due to pupils' additional and complex needs.
- Your work on raising pupils' aspirations is having a positive impact on improving pupils' attitudes to their learning and increasing their motivation to want to be successful. You have created a climate for learning in which pupils thrive. However, you recognise there is more to do to ensure that increasing proportions of disadvantaged pupils are able to achieve the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics consistently.
- Historical information has indicated that the persistent absenteeism of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was above the national average for primary schools. I wanted to know what actions leaders have taken to improve this. I found that you deal with absence and punctuality effectively. You use a raft of procedures and the support of welfare agencies to help you reduce absenteeism to a minimum. Attendance is a regular feature of your parental newsletters, including reporting the minutes of lost learning in each class due to pupil absence. This is empowering pupils to want to come to school and in your latest newsletter you recorded no lost minutes of learning. Needless to say, attendance is improving and is currently above average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- increasing proportions of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- teachers continue to strengthen pupils' outcomes in mathematics through the strong focus on developing pupils' problem solving and reasoning skills and the sharpening of pupils' mental arithmetic skills
- school improvement planning is strengthened so that priorities for improvement are linked precisely to the gains in pupils' achievement desired in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the impact of the actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding arrangements. We observed learning together in all classes and we talked to pupils about their learning. I also held meetings with four representatives of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I held a telephone discussion with the local authority's school improvement adviser. I talked informally to pupils in classes, at playtime and around school. I also talked formally with the junior leaders and listened to four pupils read. I reviewed the provisional summer 2017 results in national assessment tests of pupils in the end of key stage 2. I also checked the assessment information of all other year groups and groups of pupils for the last academic year and looked at a selection of pupils' books. Account was taken of the 18 responses from the Ofsted staff survey, the 36 responses from the pupils' survey and the 16 responses to Ofsted's parent and carer questionnaire, Parent View. A number of documents were scrutinised. These included a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed your recent headteacher's reports to governors and minutes from recent full governing body meetings and subcommittee meetings.