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Miss L Torrance
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Dear Miss Torrance

Short inspection of Castleton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a welcoming and inclusive school, where every child and their families matter. You have established a school culture based on raising pupils' aspirations by breaking down any barriers pupils have to their learning. A high proportion of children enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are below those typically expected for their age. By the time they leave the school, pupils' achievement is broadly in line with the national average.

Teaching staff know the pupils extremely well and provide interesting, relevant learning experiences that enable pupils to make good progress. Staff who responded to the staff survey state that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to be a part of it. Governors are knowledgeable and provide effective support and challenge for leaders.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and thrive in the nurturing learning environment that staff have created. Pupils grow in confidence and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They were keen to tell me that they are all treated equally. Relationships between pupils and staff are supportive and respectful. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. As one parent commented: 'Staff are friendly and encouraging. This makes the school a positive and happy environment, where children feel valued as individuals.'

Leaders have dealt effectively with the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The first required teachers to provide pupils with information to help them know how to improve their work. Teachers now provide clear directions for pupils about the next steps in their learning. Pupils use this information well to improve their learning.

Inspectors also asked you to raise pupils' achievement so that more pupils reach the higher levels. National assessments over the last few years show that your most-able pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Work in pupils' books and the lessons observed demonstrate that the most able pupils are achieving well. Pupils are engaged in their learning and are keen to challenge themselves further.

The previous inspection also noted that leaders needed to raise standards in writing, particularly for boys. Over the last few years, national assessment information shows that you have met this challenge in key stage 2. You have taken effective steps to make this improvement. These include many opportunities for staff development and improvements in checking pupils' progress. However, the proportion of boys who achieve the standard expected for their age in Reception and key stage 1 is still below the national average. During the inspection we looked at boys' progress in writing across these classes. In key stage 1, boys are making good progress from very low starting points. However, in Reception, boys' progress is not rapid enough. We agreed that there is still more to be done in this area.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose. There are many opportunities for staff and governors to attend training and they all take their roles seriously. Documents show that leaders follow up any concerns about pupils' safety thoroughly. Relationships with external agencies are effective and this contributes well to keeping pupils safe. Leaders responsible for recruitment have completed training at the appropriate level. Vetting procedures for staff and governors are thorough.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe. There is a range of assembly themes that provide useful information to pupils. All pupils whom I spoke with said that they felt very safe at school. They are confident that if bullying ever happened, staff would sort it out for them. All parents who responded to Parent View say that their children are safe and happy. As one parent commented, 'My child is thriving at this school, he feels safe, happy and well supported by the staff.'

Inspection findings

- This inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at how leaders are improving achievement in the early years. Standards before 2017 have been well below average at the end of Reception. Leaders have identified this as an area for improvement and reviewed assessment systems to ensure that they are detailed and robust. Staff check children's progress and use

this information to plan children's next steps in learning. Leaders have made improvements to the learning environment inside and outside. It is well resourced and organised. Children are keen to learn and they enjoy the opportunities provided to develop their independence. As a result, children's achievement in 2017 improved and the progress that most children make is good. Despite these improvements, you recognise that more could be done to speed up the progress that boys make, especially in their writing.

- The second key line of enquiry looked at how effectively leaders are improving pupils' writing in key stage 1. This was because in 2016 pupils' achievement was below the national average. In previous years, achievement in key stage 1 was in line with the national average. Recent improvements made to the teaching of writing across key stage 1 are having a positive impact. Pupils enjoy writing and are keen to challenge themselves further. Teachers support pupils' learning through effective feedback, which helps pupils to improve their work. Despite low starting points, pupils are making good progress and achievement is rising.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on the progress that pupils in key stage 2 make in reading. This was because progress in reading in 2017 was below the national average. Leaders have reviewed the teaching of reading and the reasons why some pupils did not make good progress. They have identified the barriers that pupils face. As a result, teachers have had relevant training to improve their subject knowledge. In lessons, more time is now spent developing pupils' comprehension skills. Leaders ensure that pupils who need to catch up receive targeted support. Leaders have also raised the profile of reading by ensuring that pupils have many opportunities to take part in fun reading events. For example, the recent extreme reading competition where pupils are caught reading in extreme, but safe, places really caught their imagination. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils' progress is beginning to improve across key stage 2. However, you recognise that reading in key stage 2 remains an area for further improvement.
- Another key line of enquiry considered the attendance and persistent absence for pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities. This was because in 2016, attendance was below the national average and persistent absence was high for these pupils. You have established effective systems to check pupils' attendance. You know the specific reasons why pupils are absent and have put targeted support in place. Governors have recently reviewed the attendance policy to improve attendance across the school. Individual case studies show that, as a result of your actions, the attendance of most of these pupils has improved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve the quality of teaching and accelerate the progress that boys make in the early years, especially in their writing
- pupils make more rapid progress in reading, by providing more opportunities to develop comprehension skills across key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Kynaston
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the senior leadership team, the business manager, the early years leader and a learning mentor. I spoke with members of the governing body and a group of pupils. I heard key stage 2 pupils read. Documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation document, the school's improvement plan, external audits, attendance information and safeguarding checks. I reviewed pupils' achievement records and your checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited lessons with you to speak with pupils and look at examples of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I examined child-protection information and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including nine free-text responses. I also took account of 14 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and eight responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I completed a review of the school's website.