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Mrs Joanne Easthope
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Easthope

Short inspection of Overton St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 September 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 school's Christian ethos is at the heart of the work of staff and leaders. Pupils learn much about values such as generosity, hope and patience. You provide thoughtful and motivating leadership, reflecting your high expectations for what pupils should achieve. Good-quality learning in happy, secure premises remains the central strength of the school. You make sure teaching remains successful. Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 is above average in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Even so, you are determinedly pursuing clear steps to improve pupils' progress.

Staff are fully committed to your clear vision for the school moving forward. Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. You are determined to make sure staff learn from one another and from frequent opportunities to meet with colleagues from other local schools. Not only is staff confidence growing, but staff support pupils' learning with increasing skill. Boys and girls benefit from a greater focus on developing their independence and their persistence in learning. Pupils enjoy their learning in different subjects because staff are becoming more creative in their teaching. You have implemented a new approach to assessment. Activities for pupils are increasingly set at the right level of difficulty.

Leaders place much emphasis on improving pupils' learning across a wide range of subjects. While pupils like mathematics, English and science, they told me that physical education (PE) is a particularly popular subject. They said that in PE they enjoy many competitive events including athletics, netball and basketball.

Leaders and managers were also asked to review the role of middle leaders. Leaders match a wide range of checks on the quality of staff's work, with regular support and training. Leaders make good use of advice from the local authority to enhance their reviews and checks on the school's improvement. This means leaders' priorities and plans are clear and suited well to the needs of the school.

Governors now check the work of the school much more closely. They consider information about pupils' achievement thoroughly. You assist governors to be unafraid to ask questions and challenge you. Governors have a clear understanding of the needs of the school. They plan for the long-term development of the school with care.

Parents say that you are visible at the school each day. They say they feel comfortable to talk with you about their children's education. Parents are pleased you know each child and family in detail. You encourage parents to link even more closely together to raise funds for the school. Pupils feel valued. For example, one comment included, 'we get a voice' and leaders listen and act on what they say.

At the previous inspection, pupils' writing was not developing as strongly as other aspects of their learning and leaders were asked to improve pupils' progress. Recent national changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements have made this issue more difficult to resolve. Even so, pupils' attainment in writing is above average. They are now writing more extended pieces of work and longer sentences with skill. School information shows leaders are clear about the obstacles to progress and that recent actions are shifting the quality of pupils' writing in the right direction.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of the school in caring for pupils and protecting them from harm is positive and supportive. Leaders establish that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records about pupils' welfare are detailed and appropriate. Pupils say they are safe at school. They feel able to approach any member of staff or the headteacher with any concerns they have about their lives. Pupils have a good awareness of how to stay safe when using roads or when meeting strangers. Pupils say staff listen to them when they share their views or concerns. Pupils learn to respect differences between themselves and others. Through a strong emphasis on improving behaviour and celebrating anti-bullying week, pupils know how to avoid online bullying. They say issues of any type of bullying are dealt with quickly and successfully by staff.

Staff have access to appropriate child protection training and know how to respond to any concerns they may have about pupils' well-being. They know how to prevent

pupils from exposure to radicalised views of modern Britain. Governors stay up to date with their safeguarding information by accessing regular training.

Inspection findings

- Where the teaching of mathematics is most successful, pupils thrive. This is because of good subject knowledge among staff, careful planning of lessons and skilful use of assessment within activities to adapt adult support. The proportion of current pupils in Year 6 achieving at greater depth in mathematics is high. Teachers and teaching assistants work together successfully in lessons. They increasingly question and support the learning of individual pupils with success. Pupils like the challenge that staff give them. They respond positively to staff's high expectations for them to explain their thinking and reasoning. Current mathematics work set for pupils in key stage 1 matches the needs of different pupils. Clear actions are in place to strengthen teaching in key stage 1 further.
- The stronger role of middle leaders ensures they know the school in detail. They use their knowledge to contribute much to the improvement of teaching and pupils' learning in different subjects. They check the quality of pupils' work, review the accuracy of staff assessments and support staff well through training. Science is led very successfully. Staff enjoy teaching this subject. Staff skills have grown strongly due to skilful support from the science coordinator. Staff assess pupils' skills thoroughly. They celebrate pupils' learning in science and a wide range of other subjects through attractive displays around the school. Staff make pupils' learning worthwhile by arranging trips, for example to the local power station, and by hosting visitors to school. Pupils' attainment in science is high. Given the extensive focus on improving science in the school, it is little wonder that staff have achieved an external quality mark for their work in this subject.
- Leaders' clear and incisive reviews of teaching and pupils' learning, mean they and staff know the key issues in the school. Leaders' plans for improvement identify precisely the actions necessary to strengthen pupils' learning. Leaders' review of pupils' progress in writing goes some way in explaining the data for 2017 in writing. Leaders, staff and governors all share the focus on making sure pupils' ability to write improves strongly. Improvements in staff training, support and the use of resources in lessons means the teaching of spelling and grammar is more adept. Current pupils are becoming confident and skilful in these aspects of writing. Pupils increasingly want to write because staff are making much better use of exciting fiction and non-fiction books to stimulate their ideas. Pupils are starting to write more thoughtfully in subjects such as geography and history, as well as English. For example, in a key stage 2 lesson pupils were deeply engaged in writing about the features of a legend. Pupils' learning flourished. The most able pupils responded especially positively to the extra challenge of identifying what aspects of the legend of King Arthur may have been embellished. While the quality of pupils' work is improving, school information indicates that leaders need to do even more to make certain that all pupils achieve the highest standards in their writing.
- Pupils on the school council are confident, articulate and polite. They represent their school with pride and are a credit to themselves. Pupils have a good

understanding of how democracy works in the school. Pupils feel that school leaders genuinely listen to them and that their views lead to positive changes in the school. For example, pupils arranged fundraising activities to help pay for various school trips, including adventurous outdoor activities. Pupils recognise that democracy also means that some of their ideas may be heard but not implemented. For example, their request for a permanent bouncy castle in the school playground has not been accepted.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff build on the strengths in pupils' writing to sustain improvement.

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

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I visited a sample of classrooms to observe learning. With you and the deputy headteacher, I reviewed a sample of pupils' work. I met with you and other leaders to discuss your evaluation of the school and your plans for improvement. I spoke to some parents as they brought their children to school. I reviewed responses from 23 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I reviewed a response from one member of staff to an Ofsted survey. I considered responses from 26 pupils to an Ofsted questionnaire. I met with 10 pupils from the school council to discuss their views of the school. I met with an adviser from Lancashire local authority. I met with four governors, including the chair. I reviewed information about the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe and protected.