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Mrs Jackie Cooke  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Cooke

### **Short inspection of Middleton Parish Church School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 October 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

After a time of turbulence in senior leadership, you have worked with your governing body and the local authority to develop a stable and hard-working team. When capacity was not at full strength, too many responsibilities lay on the shoulders of too few leaders. This contributed to some deterioration in pupils' achievement and attendance in 2017. Renewed leadership capacity has enabled you to create positions of responsibility and to distribute accountability across a wider range of staff at all levels. As a result, you have improved the areas which underperformed in 2017.

No one has been complacent. You and your governors have acted on recommendations made after thorough reviews commissioned by the local authority. All leaders have a good understanding of the school's current strengths and areas for improvement, and are implementing strategies which are having a positive impact on outcomes for pupils.

Your school's aim 'to fulfil everyone's potential in a friendly, caring, Christian environment where all are valued' permeates all aspects of school life. Pupils were keen to explain to me how they learn to respect everyone, including those whose culture, race, lifestyle or religion are different from their own. Displays such as 'Female Superheroes' from bible stories and 'Stamp out Stereotypes' highlight the

school's commitment to celebrating diversity. Pupils explained to me the meaning of your ever-visible mission statement, 'Excellence, Truth, Grace', and told me how they fill 'Gem Jars' when they demonstrate each of these attributes.

The school's governors bring a wide range of professional, educational and financial skills and experience to their role. They now insist on receiving detailed reports in advance of meetings so that they are in a better position to ask forthright and detailed questions about all areas of school life. As a result, they have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

With some success, you have addressed the areas for improvement outlined in the Ofsted report of 2013. They relate to pupils' progress, especially in reading and at the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics; the match of work to pupils' prior attainment and capabilities; teachers' questioning of pupils; sharing good practice in teaching; and better teaching focus and observation in the early years.

In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, progress in reading and mathematics was similar to the national average. However, progress in writing was below that of pupils across the country who achieved similar results at the end of Year 2. For current pupils in the school, this picture is improving. Pupils in Year 6 are already achieving better results in reading, writing and mathematics than the end-of-year results in 2017.

Staff now place greater emphasis on using assessment information to plan work which takes into account what pupils have already achieved and what they still need to learn. My observations of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' work showed clearly that teachers' planning and organisation allow individuals and groups to work at an appropriate level. You deploy teaching assistants well to support pupils' needs.

During the inspection, I saw examples of teachers using questions to extend pupils' understanding and clarify misconceptions. This was particularly evident in relation to problem-solving in mathematics.

There have been many changes in the early years. The creation of a school Nursery has facilitated better transition to the Reception class. Parents and carers are now familiar with the school's expectations, children settle in more quickly and staff already know their needs well. The new electronic recording of observations allows staff to see more easily what children have accomplished and what their next steps should be.

In April 2017, you began working within the Middleton Collaborative of schools. This has widened opportunities for staff to undertake professional development and to share good practice in leadership, teaching and assessment. It has also enabled teachers to moderate their assessments to ensure accuracy.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and records are detailed and of high quality. The link governor for safeguarding is very experienced in this area. Her regular visits to the school provide support in monitoring this aspect of school life. Your staff are tenacious in pursuing outside agencies to make sure that they act promptly. Your business manager keeps a record of the required checks on all adults in the school to verify that they are safe to work with children.

Pupils feel safe in the school and know whom to speak to should they have concerns. Teachers and visitors have taught them how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media. All adults undertake regular training and know how to recognise the signs of physical and emotional abuse, even in the smallest details of a pupil's appearance, attendance or behaviour.

You have invested in very committed pastoral staff and mentors. This team works skilfully to gain the trust and confidence of vulnerable pupils and their families. Staff work with increasing success to reach out to families who are reluctant to visit the school.

## **Inspection findings**

- I was interested to know if you had implemented effective strategies to reverse the declining trend in attendance. Despite a wide range of rewards for good attendance, there are still too many pupils, mostly those who are disadvantaged, who do not attend school regularly enough. To work more intensively with pupils and families, you have developed a dedicated attendance team which includes a newly appointed attendance mentor. Fewer families take holidays in term time since the local authority reinstated penalty notices. However, we agreed that improving attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, is still a priority for the school.
- I wanted to know if more pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 are now on track to achieve at greater depth. A better match of work to pupils' prior attainment and capabilities has resulted in more challenge for the most able. Booster classes and additional teachers, working with Years 2, 3 and 6 particularly, have increased opportunities for teachers to support most-able pupils in undertaking more difficult tasks successfully. This is particularly true in relation to extended writing. The school's progress information indicates that a greater proportion of pupils are now working beyond what is expected for their age. However, we agreed that more still needs to be done to ensure that most-able pupils achieve their full potential.
- Another of my lines of enquiry related to the underperformance of boys in relation to girls, especially in reading at key stage 2 and in the number reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage. You have begun to work with a local teaching school alliance to raise the attainment of boys in reading, especially that of disadvantaged boys in Year 5. Your records

show that boys' reading in Year 5 is improving. The staff involved are disseminating their experience to the rest of the school. Nevertheless, you recognise that, despite some diminishing of differences, boys still underperform in relation to girls.

- In the early years, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development has been consistently above the national average and is increasing. Although the number of boys achieving this threshold is lower than that of girls, this is a reflection of their lack of social and language skills when they begin in the Nursery or Reception class. However, you recognise that this area remains a school priority and have implemented strategies to support boys in achieving a good level of development and readiness for the demands of Year 1.
- Involvement in outdoor education projects and the development of the outdoor space as a learning environment have improved boys' motivation to learn. I observed storytelling in the forest area. A small group of children, mostly boys, listened with rapt attention while the teacher read 'Three Billy Goats Gruff'. The children answered questions and re-enacted the story in a similar environment to that in which it is set. The outdoor setting enhanced opportunities to motivate children, especially boys, and to develop their listening, speaking and social skills.
- I wanted to find out if disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than in previous years. Plans for the spending of the pupil premium funding identify the barriers to learning that these pupils face. You have invested wisely in reducing these barriers and in staff who prioritise supporting this group both pastorally and academically. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving but they have still not caught up with their peers. Despite the best efforts of staff, too many disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough. You have now created a larger pastoral team to work specifically with disadvantaged pupils and families to address their needs and encourage better attendance.
- Results in the phonics screening check deteriorated slightly in 2017. You have now given a teacher specific responsibility for phonics. Staff identify pupils' specific weaknesses early and arrange individual and group interventions. Phonics skills are now better developed than they were last year.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- boys make better progress in reading and a greater proportion achieve a good level of development in readiness for Year 1
- disadvantaged pupils attend school more regularly and make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- more pupils achieve the higher standards 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 Manchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rochdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Liz Kelly  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection I had discussions with you, your leadership team and members of the governing body. I visited classrooms with you and your deputy headteacher. I spoke to a range of pupils in lessons, in a discussion group and at social times. I looked at pupils' work from all year groups. I analysed the school's website and a range of documents, including the single central record, records of child protection and staff training, the school's self-evaluation and the improvement plan. I considered reviews conducted by the local authority. I discussed with senior leaders aspects of safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and the use of funding. I considered 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including a number of free-text comments made by parents. I also considered 44 responses to Ofsted's online pupils' questionnaire and 17 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.