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Miss Anne Wolstanholme  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Wolstanholme

### **Short inspection of Larkholme Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 November 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You took on the headship at Larkholme in January 2017, and the deputy headteacher joined the school at the start of this academic year. You are, therefore, very much a newly formed senior leadership team. You and other leaders, including governors, quickly recognised there were aspects of the school's performance which needed to be addressed and you have set about doing this. The pace of change has been rapid, and the great majority of staff understand why this is the case and are fully supportive. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are also supportive and said they would recommend the school to others. However, a significant minority were concerned about the ongoing changes and felt that communication between school and home could be clearer.

The previous inspection report asked the school to provide pupils with more chances to apply their skills in mathematics. You have overseen a comprehensive overhaul of how mathematics is taught in the school, and the approach that has now been adopted does ensure that pupils build up their mathematical skills and then apply them in problem-solving situations. Leaders were also asked to ensure that learning was well matched to pupils' abilities. You and the governors know that the most able pupils have not been routinely challenged by the work set for them. You have asked teachers to make sure that the most able pupils are further challenged. There is evidence in pupils' work which shows that this is beginning to

happen.

You, your fellow leaders and governors know there is still more to be done. You have drawn up an extensive school development plan to tackle remaining areas for improvement. However, you acknowledge that this currently is highly detailed and unwieldy, and its length makes tracking and measuring its success quite a challenge.

Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and positive. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, which can be seen in the way in which they listen well, both to their teachers and to their classmates' ideas and answers. Typically, pupils behave sensibly around school, for example when waiting patiently to go into the library, and when on the playground. A small number of pupils do have more difficulty managing their own behaviour, particularly at lunchtimes, but leaders have ensured that there are strategies in place to provide these pupils with the support they need.

One key strength of the school is the quality of the curriculum on offer. Pupils say that they enjoy learning about different topics, including space, chocolate and the Victorians. Teachers ensure that pupils develop subject-specific skills, as well as increasing their factual knowledge. For example, pupils' work in science shows they can carry out an experiment, make predictions about what will happen and then draw conclusions from what they see. In history, Year 6 pupils have learned how women's roles have changed over time, while in geography, pupils develop mapping skills. The school also has a strong sporting tradition, and pupils learn to be healthy and active through lessons and extra-curricular clubs. Many have had the chance to be in one of the school's sports teams, including football, swimming and netball.

A second significant strength is the quality of the early years provision. The early years staff ensure that there are good links with local pre-school and nursery providers. Parents of children in the Reception Year comment on how well the children have settled into school. Provision, indoors and outside, is well-planned and engages children's interests. In the Reception Year, staff very effectively help children to develop their written and spoken language. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is now above the national average.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on staff and governors to make sure they are suitable people to work with children. These checks are recorded diligently. Staff and governors receive regular training covering different aspects of safeguarding. As a result, staff understand the procedures to follow if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support they need.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, especially when using the internet. Nine out of 10 parents who responded to Parent View said their children were safe and well cared for in school. A significant minority did

express some concerns about how well the school dealt with bullying. However, although pupils said bullying did sometimes happen in school, almost all said that any incidents were dealt with effectively by their teachers, and they were happy coming to school.

## **Inspection findings**

- A key focus for the inspection was the quality of reading in key stage 2. For the last three years, progress in reading has been significantly below the national average. The rates of progress in reading of pupils in nine out of 10 schools nationally have been better than at Larkholme. The inspection, therefore, looked closely at how well reading is taught currently, and how effective leadership is being in bringing about the rapid improvement that is required.
- The new senior leadership team has recognised that progress in reading is a serious issue for the school, and acknowledges this has been the case for too long. Leaders have now taken decisive action to address the issue. The subject leader for English has introduced a revised approach to how reading is taught. She has used her subject knowledge and skills to model this new approach to less experienced members of staff. Teachers are more clearly focused on helping pupils to develop a wide range of reading comprehension skills, including using non-fiction texts for research and inferring meaning from fiction books.
- The school's assessment information and examples of pupils' work show that progress in reading in key stage 2 is now accelerating. Observations of guided reading sessions in Year 3 showed teachers and teaching assistants using questioning skilfully to develop pupils' understanding. This indicates that the good start pupils make in key stage 1 is now being built upon more effectively. Pupils say they enjoy using the school library, which is well stocked with a good selection of fiction and non-fiction books. The older, most-able readers talk confidently about their book choices and favourite authors, and are confident, fluent readers. They recognise there is a greater focus on teaching reading effectively and are positive about its impact.
- Some younger pupils, particularly those whose phonics skills developed more slowly, still find reading more difficult. On occasion, this is because teachers have not made sure that the books these pupils read are at the right level for their ability. Where this is the case, pupils struggle to read unfamiliar words and understand the text, and so their progress slows.
- While leaders have now acted to improve progress in reading, and there are promising signs that a corner has been turned, there is still more to be done. Some older pupils in key stage 2 are still catching up to where they should be, as a result of previous teaching that failed to secure their good progress. Leaders acknowledge this and are determined to push ahead with reading improvements, so pupils' progress accelerates further.
- The other key line of enquiry for the inspection considered the effectiveness of leaders' tracking of different groups of pupils. This was a focus because, over time, the progress and attainment of some groups have been inconsistent. For example, the most able pupils do not consistently reach the higher standards of

which they are capable, while in Year 6 in 2017, girls' progress in reading and mathematics lagged behind that of boys. It is clear now that leaders have put in place detailed tracking systems to keep a careful check on how well different groups of pupils are doing in each class. There is a greater focus on challenging the most able pupils, which was evident in their work. Leaders meet regularly with teachers to discuss and review the progress of pupils in their classes, ensuring that no groups are overlooked. Current assessment information indicates that, although there are some differences between classes, variations in the achievement of different groups overall are diminishing successfully.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategies to improve pupils' outcomes in reading are further embedded and refined so they have the maximum possible impact
- teachers make sure that pupils whose reading and phonics skills are less secure are given texts to read at the right level in order to improve their fluency in reading and their understanding of what they read
- school improvement plans are sharpened and made more manageable by concentrating their focus on the school's most crucial improvement priorities
- communication between the school's leaders and home is improved in order to strengthen relationships with parents and make sure that parents are confident in, and fully understand, the reasons behind school leaders' decisions.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection I met with you, other school leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also met a group of staff and a group of pupils. I held a discussion about reading with a group of older pupils and heard a group of younger pupils read. I considered 65 responses from parents to Parent View, including free-text comments, 10 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 22 responses to the staff survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work from a range of subjects and year groups. I also looked at documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.