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Mrs Gaynor Stubbs
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Stubbs

Short inspection of Armitage Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, you have improved the quality of pupils' writing considerably. Evidence shows that pupils in each year group write successfully. Pupils are motivated and enthusiastic writers who make rapid progress in their skills. Senior and middle leaders are clear about how to raise standards in pupils' writing even further.

Parents and carers told me that this is a school that cares about pupils and their families. Parents and pupils said that staff and leaders listen and respond to their views. Parents are very happy with their children's learning, including the quality of extra-curricular activities and trips. It is little wonder that the number of pupils attending the school has grown significantly in recent years.

Throughout the school, pupils behave very positively. During the inspection, it was a joy to see the pupils' eco-team unintentionally disrupt a meeting of adults. Pupils were so keen to complete their tasks to check that computers and lights were switched off. This is because pupils want to improve their school. They take their responsibilities as citizens seriously.

Leaders and governors intentionally consider how they can give a helping hand to the way that staff feel about their work at Armitage. Staff morale is high. They value the support and advice from colleagues and leaders that assist them to fine-tune their work. You enable staff to have frequent debates about teaching and learning, not only with one another, but with outside experts, including those from universities.

You set a high standard for the work of staff. The impact shows in many ways, for example in the very professional greeting from office staff at the school reception desk and, equally, in the clarity and accuracy of middle and senior leaders' understanding of the work of the school. Staff's displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors celebrate this work attractively. An example of this is the display of work on the importance of the Suffragette movement in establishing women's right to vote.

Pupils make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have made science and the wider curriculum priorities for improvement. This is not because these subjects are weak but because leaders want to see the school excel even more.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that leaders continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You have achieved this while appointing several new teachers to the staff team. Most teaching is skilful, engaging and challenging. Staff use their detailed knowledge of subjects and of teaching to good effect to make much of pupils' learning engaging and rewarding. Nonetheless, we agreed that some art activities in the early years do not challenge children enough. We also agreed that some pupils in Year 1 need greater support from staff during their play activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to learn about keeping themselves safe. Staff display clear messages about safeguarding in pupil-friendly ways throughout the school. Parents and pupils know how to raise issues with staff and leaders. Pupils feel safe at school. They said that staff respond effectively to any reports of bullying.

Leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the challenges to safety and well-being that some local pupils and families experience. Leaders train staff fully to recognise and respond to local risks to pupils. You make sure that several staff who have completed high-level training in safeguarding are available throughout the year to attend multi-agency meetings or to deal with concerns from colleagues. Governors' understanding of safeguarding is growing quickly because leaders give them guidance and training matched to their needs. Staff and leaders record concerns about pupils' care and protection carefully. Leaders review information meticulously. They make timely and proper referrals to other agencies.

Inspection findings

- Senior and middle leaders have a clear and informed understanding of the strengths and priorities for improvement in the school. Their reviews of the work of staff are honest and well thought out. Leaders use information about pupils' progress and attainment expertly to ask challenging questions of themselves and staff. The subject leader for English is passionate and knowledgeable. She uses her expertise ably to support colleagues in improving their teaching of writing. Leaders check in detail the quality of pupils' writing in each year group. They review this information carefully against national expectations and the school curriculum, to pinpoint areas for improvement.
- Pupils make strong progress in their writing throughout their time at the school. Current pupils, including boys, write purposefully. Their work shows that they make huge strides in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling, their skills in presentation and their use of interesting and varied language. I saw clear evidence that pupils enjoy writing, want to write and know what makes writing effective. Leaders and staff make extensive use of a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books to inspire pupils and to develop their language. This gives much support to pupils' writing. For example, a boy whose earlier work was not so rich in language wrote in character, 'I feel sorrowful and downhearted.' Staff's planned activities to teach pupils to write in key stages 1 and 2 are highly engaging and enjoyable. For example, during the inspection, pupils were learning to edit their work. They scrutinised one another's efforts in a timed task, writing as if they were a burglar. Staff in the early years give children valuable opportunities to write, for example about scary sea monsters.
- Leaders' information shows that much teaching across classes is first rate and helps pupils to triumph over difficulties. This is because of the precise way that leaders develop staff's knowledge of different subjects and their teaching skills. Leaders use the insights of experts from outside the school to check the accuracy of their reviews of pupils' learning. During the inspection, I was struck by the passion and deep enthusiasm of staff for teaching. They love their jobs and want to refine the quality of their work as much as they can. Pupils, including the most able, engage confidently in the tasks set by teachers. Staff use challenging questions and appropriate technical language to aid pupils' learning. However, in some play activities in Year 1, staff do not give pupils enough support to maximise their progress.
- In the early years, staff boost children's language skills through lots of opportunities to talk. They support children competently in creating pretend worlds with toys and acting in adult roles. Children learn to coordinate their physical abilities with confidence, through a wide range of activities outdoors. In adult-led phonics activities, children are taught to recognise the sounds that letters make. However, some art activities do not develop children's creativity well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- art activities in the early years better develop children's creativity
- staff in Year 1 support and extend pupils' learning more during their play-based activities.

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 Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders to consider your evaluation of the school and your plans for further improvement. We met with the school inclusion manager to discuss arrangements for safeguarding pupils. You and I visited classes to observe pupils' activities and talk with them about their learning. I met with the leaders for lower key stage 2 and for English to review evidence of pupils' writing in their books. I met with three governors and separately with the chair of governors. I met with a representative of the local authority. I spoke by telephone to an external adviser whom you employ to challenge and support leaders regularly. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. I met with three representatives of the parent council. I considered the views of 24 parents shared through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the views of seven pupils and 21 staff given in response to Ofsted's surveys. I looked at a range of school documentation, including reviews of pupils' progress and attainment. I checked the single central record of employment checks on staff, governors and volunteers. I reviewed examples of leaders' records about safeguarding.