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Mrs Janette Walker
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Walker

Short inspection of Belle Vale Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been significant changes in staffing since the previous inspection. You have appointed a new assistant headteacher, new teachers, middle leaders and governors over the past four years. You and the governors have worked hard to employ staff who have a range of skills and expertise and, as a result, you have created a strong and cohesive team.

You, leaders and staff provide a welcoming and warm environment for pupils and visitors to the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and value their learning. They are polite, well mannered and proud to be pupils here. You teach pupils to be considerate and encourage them to fulfil their potential. As one pupil told me, 'We learn together to be the best we can be.'

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and are positive about the leadership and management of the school. They value highly the approachable nature of staff and feel that their children are very well cared for and make good progress. Staff feel well supported and are proud to work at Belle Vale primary school. They said that the school is a safe and positive environment for children, where behaviour is good and all pupils are challenged to do their best. The high expectations of staff, leaders and governors are evident throughout the school.

The inclusive nature of the school is strong. You welcome pupils from all backgrounds. You teach pupils to be tolerant of others, regardless of differences. As a result, pupils

treat each other with care; they learn and play well together. You hold all staff firmly to account as you strive to ensure that pupils have access to a full and round curriculum. This ensures that they have opportunities to excel in a wide range of areas. You are determined that pupils will leave school well prepared for high school, both academically and socially. Your moral purpose and leadership are unwavering, as is your belief in what your pupils can and should achieve.

You and the governors are aware of the school's strengths and the areas which you need to develop further. Governors undertake relevant training and are proactive in making sure that they have clear plans in place to continue to the school's journey of improvement in the future. Governors are knowledgeable, highly committed and passionate. They know the school well and challenge and support you in equal measure. They have the best interests of pupils at the heart of all they do. Leaders and governors work closely with the local authority, which works with you to improve and assess the quality of the school's work in all areas.

Governors and leaders have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Inspectors identified the need to improve mathematics. Despite progress in mathematics being slightly lower than progress in reading and writing in 2017, it is still in line with the national average. The progress of current learners is strong. Opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning skills and problem-solving are evident in work and in discussions with pupils. Pupils talk with confidence about mathematics. They gave many examples of where they used their mathematical skills in other subjects, such as creating timelines in history, fair tests in science and in working out the age of an author if they were alive today.

Following the previous inspection, you improved pupils' spelling by a focus on effective phonics in early years and key stage 1. As a result, recent test scores show that almost three quarters of children across the school have a spelling age higher than their actual age. Teachers consistently use the school's spelling policy across the school. Pupils know what they need to do to correct any misspellings identified in their work.

At the last inspection, inspectors also identified the need to further improve the quality of the outdoor provision for early years, with a greater focus on the development of basic skills.

There have been several changes in staffing, leadership, procedures and policies in early years. These have brought about a new enthusiasm and focused approach to improvement. In 2015, you opened a pre-school. This has afforded you the chance to improve children's knowledge and skills right from an early age. You have had an increased focus on communication and language. You make sure that all activities provide challenge in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, there is a four-year improving trend of children achieving a good level of development, moving towards the national average. This represents strong progress from children's starting points. Outdoor provision has improved as you have created discrete learning areas with music, bubbles, opportunities for number and mark-making. Teachers now make good use of the outside area.

During the inspection, you acknowledged that continuing to develop the role of middle leaders is a priority, so that their leadership has a positive effect on outcomes. In addition to this, continuing to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a priority for school leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All safeguarding records, documentation and policies are compliant and up to date. Leaders work tirelessly to support vulnerable pupils and signpost pupils and their families to early help and support if needed. You have developed positive relationships with families and also with a wide range of agencies. These include health services, attendance support, social care, the fire service and many more. You use these relationships well to promote the safety and well-being of pupils.

Pupils feel safe in school, and parents and staff agree that they are safe. Pupils said that bullying rarely occurs, and if it does, staff deal with it effectively. Pupils are confident to discuss any concerns that they may have with staff, or use the 'worry monster' in each class to let teachers know how they are feeling. You teach pupils how to stay safe in school and in the wider community through the curriculum and assemblies. Your approach to teaching philosophy means that pupils gain a good understanding of a wide range of current and relevant topics. Pupils enjoy debating moral issues and listen well to others and respect their views.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of this inspection, we considered a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at how effectively leaders are improving outcomes for key stage 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils across key stage 2 are making good progress in the core subjects. Current information provided by leaders shows that the majority of Year 6 pupils are working towards the expected standards in mathematics and reading. Teacher assessments for writing indicate that pupils are making good progress, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders' approach to improving challenge across the school is having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning. As a direct result of this challenge and developing the resilience of pupils, school information shows that the proportion of pupils currently on track to reach the higher standards is higher than previous years' published results.
- The progress and attainment of pupils in other year groups are positive, including the progress of girls and disadvantaged pupils. The strong leadership of the headteacher ensures that all pupils are encouraged and supported to reach their potential, despite any barriers to learning which may be present.
- The second line of enquiry considered the achievement of disadvantaged children in the early years. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in early years is rising year on year towards the national average. However, the attainment of disadvantaged children is lower than that of their non-disadvantaged peers both in school and nationally.

- Although fewer disadvantaged children achieved a good level of development than their peers in previous years, current children are making good progress from their typically low starting points. This strong progress is a result of a wide range of strategies specifically designed to allow teachers to intervene quickly when children need support. Strategies to improve communication and language are particularly successful in developing children's listening, understanding and speaking skills.
- The leader of the early years and the leader responsible for pupil premium funding work closely together to support the progress of disadvantaged children in all aspects of their development. Leaders initiate early referrals to speech and language support, and adults model language frequently. Specific 'early talk' and reading programmes are successful in improving outcomes for all children, particularly for those who are disadvantaged. Leaders also work closely with parents to reinforce the strategies being used in school so that learning continues at home. Significant improvements in progress can be seen following these interventions. All disadvantaged children are on track to make good progress during their time in the early years.
- Another key line of enquiry looked at the attendance and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This was because, in 2016, attendance of these groups of pupils was below that of pupils nationally. These pupils were also more likely to be regularly absent from school.
- You have appointed a learning mentor who establishes strong, positive relationships with pupils and their families. You ensure that families receive support to help their children to attend school regularly. Individual cases show that, as a result of your actions, the attendance of some of these pupils has improved considerably. Consequently, the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is now improving quickly towards the national average.
- The attendance of girls and disadvantaged pupils has fallen this year and is lower than the national average. You recognise that there is more to be done to ensure that pupils attend school regularly, regardless of their circumstances.
- Across the school, governors, leaders and staff have the highest expectations for all pupils. You work as a team to provide a good quality of education for pupils. Your leadership is strong and provides clear direction for all. You create a happy and caring environment, in which pupils are well behaved and where the children are everyone's main priority.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of all pupils continues to improve, particularly that of girls and disadvantaged pupils
- the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school decreases further
- they continue to develop leadership capacity so that middle leaders develop their skills and have a marked and positive impact on pupils' outcomes in the core and foundation subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and other staff. In addition, I met with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. You accompanied me on visits to classes where we observed teaching and learning, spoke with pupils and looked at the work in some pupils' books.

I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance and the school's assessment of pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised a range of policies and the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation report.

As part of the inspection, I considered 24 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and comments received via the free-text facility. I took into account the 31 responses to a questionnaire for pupils. I also spoke with parents informally in the playground.