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Mrs Christine Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Simonstone St Peter's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up the role of permanent headteacher in September 2015, having previously served as acting headteacher and as assistant headteacher. Your current deputy headteacher has been in post since September 2016.

You have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.

You have worked effectively to improve pupils' achievement, ensuring that staff are fully aware of the higher expectations contained in the revised national curriculum, which has come into effect since the last inspection. You have established thorough systems to ensure that staff have opportunities to improve their practice. These include working in pairs to observe each other's teaching and share effective methods. You also carry out more formal checks on the quality of teaching, giving feedback to staff on areas to develop. There is a sharper focus now on holding teachers to account for pupils' progress through regular meetings. These meetings also present an opportunity to ensure that appropriate support is in place for pupils whose progress is slower than expected.

Because of your actions, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and Year 6 in 2017 was

above the national average, which represents strong progress and an improvement on the results for 2016. Evidence from workbooks and the school's own assessment information shows that most current pupils make similar progress. However, you accept that progress needs to be stronger so that more pupils achieve the higher standard in each subject. You also recognise that teachers need to be more consistent in providing challenging work for the most able in order to secure better progress.

You have transferred the school's existing good practice in reading, writing and mathematics to other subjects by improving your assessment and tracking system. This mirrors the system used for English and mathematics and has a clear focus on the skills pupils need to acquire. Evidence from pupils' work shows that teachers use the information provided by this system to ensure that pupils acquire the appropriate skills at a rapid pace. Teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to use, for instance, writing skills in other subjects. They also allow pupils to make their own decisions around the content and presentation of their work. This is effective in enabling pupils to deepen their understanding according to their ability. For example, in history in Year 6, pupils make comparisons between Athens and Sparta, choosing for themselves the features that they feel are most relevant.

You have a secure grasp of the quality of education you provide at the school. You are ambitious for continuing improvement. You have brought about better test results for pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 compared with 2016. You have devised plans for improvement that contain actions focused on further development, including for the most able pupils. You recognise, however, that more precision in the ways in which you measure the effectiveness of your actions, with a firm focus on pupils' achievement, will enable you to target those actions more effectively.

You and your staff create a warm and welcoming environment that is strongly influenced by the school's Christian character. Parents and pupils alike are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, typically commented on the 'nurturing environment', the 'loving, family atmosphere' and the fact that their children achieve well and grow in confidence.

Pupils enjoy all aspects of school life, including the wide range of activities you provide, such as educational visits and clubs, which are effective in supporting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

You ensure that the premises are in excellent condition and you are always keen to find ways to get the most out of the space you have available. For example, you have recently had a conservation area built in the school grounds. You use this to encourage pupils to appreciate nature and also to stimulate them in their development of, for instance, writing skills or practical mathematical work.

You are eager to develop and refine your pupils' learning skills. To this end, you have introduced a programme of activities within the school's curriculum to develop

their resilience and to help them understand the benefits of learning from their mistakes. This contributes well to pupils' positive attitudes to learning, which I observed during the inspection, and to the overall picture of strong progress.

Staff are very positive about the school. They appreciate the training you provide for them, which ranges from the paired observations and sharing of good practice, as reported earlier, to courses designed to improve their knowledge and skills. They feel these activities are useful in improving their performance.

The local authority has a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and is confident about the quality of leadership. It provides effective support at a level appropriate to the school's needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The designated safeguarding lead makes prompt referrals when needed to appropriate agencies, such as children's services, although there are very few cases. The school's record of required checks on members of staff is suitable and complies with government guidance.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils feel safe there because adults give them helpful information. They know, for example, that they should not share personal details when they are using the internet. They also know they can trust their appointed key worker to listen and respond to any concerns they raise. Bullying is rare and pupils know that adults will manage it effectively if required. Your staff have a secure understanding of safeguarding processes because they have undertaken effective training. They know how to recognise the various signs of abuse.

Governors have a very clear overview of safeguarding procedures. They receive regular reports from senior leaders. The chair of governors has regular meetings with the designated person responsible for safeguarding in the school to discuss any issues that emerge.

Leaders take all reasonable steps to ensure that pupils are safe from traffic on arrival at and departure from school. There are written risk assessments in place, which contain suitable safe systems, such as preventing parking near the school entrance by placing clear signage to warn parents arriving by car and other motorists.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the day, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry, which formed the basis of the inspection. I have already reported on how successfully you have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. I have also noted how effectively leaders manage safeguarding arrangements in

the school.

- My next line of enquiry concerned how you ensure that as many pupils as possible reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. I also explored why girls in Year 6 performed less strongly than boys at the high standard or greater depth in the tests in 2017. You were quick to analyse the reasons behind girls' underperformance in this respect and identified areas to develop. As a result of your analysis, you put new strategies in place across all year groups. In reading, there is now a more focused approach to inference and deduction that is appropriate to pupils' ability and age. In mathematics, you have strengthened the emphasis on problem-solving and reasoning skills. In writing, you now have a system that enables pupils to write at length and without support more frequently. You have also adapted your assessment procedures so that they more acutely centre on identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge and providing support to address these. As a result of your actions, pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that the proportion of current pupils achieving higher standards is growing. However, you recognise that teachers are less consistent in providing challenge to some most-able pupils, for example, in lower key stage 2. This means that your strategies, although starting to have a positive impact, have yet to ensure that more pupils reach the higher standards across almost all year groups.
- Another focus for the inspection was on how well leaders accelerate progress in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. Across most year groups, current pupils make strong progress. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard is increasing and is typically higher than the national average, using Year 2 or Year 6 figures for comparison. Your strategies, such as more focused work on sharing effective teaching methods and the increased opportunities to develop, for instance, writing skills in other subjects, have contributed effectively to this improvement. For example, in science in Year 6, pupils write well-organised texts about evolution, with a degree of sophistication appropriate to their ability. This matches the quality of writing in English work. However, as noted in the previous paragraph, you realise that maximising the number of pupils who achieve at the higher standards is key to securing even faster progress.
- Another key line of enquiry was the rate of current pupils' progress in phonics in Year 1. Typically, a large majority of pupils meet the threshold in the phonics check in Year 1, although the proportion reduced slightly in 2017. This was because some pupils had additional needs. Evidence from pupils' work and from assessment information shows that current pupils make strong progress. Teachers provide pupils with plenty of opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge. For example, pupils write their own sentences or questions, using words containing the phoneme they have just learned. At the most recent assessment in the spring term, all pupils were working at or above the expected learning phase for their age.
- Finally, leaders and governors clearly understand their statutory duties. The school's website is now compliant. Governors provide leaders with effective challenge and support. They hold leaders stringently to account, asking suitably searching questions about matters such as pupils' progress and the school's

finances.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to implement their successful strategies to secure even stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics by challenging the most able more consistently, so that more pupils achieve at the higher standard across all year groups
- they include in their action plans for improvement more precise statements about how they will measure the effectiveness of their actions, making a clearer connection to pupils' achievement.

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

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I carried out short visits to the early years and all year groups in key stage 1 and key stage 2. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with you, other members of staff, governors and pupils. I had a discussion with a representative of the local authority. I analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information. I evaluated 28 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I also evaluated 10 responses to the staff survey and 19 responses to the pupil survey.