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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs J Banks
Headteacher
Balderstone St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Commons Lane
Balderstone
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB2 7LL

Dear Mrs Banks

Short inspection of Balderstone St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a welcoming school where the Christian beliefs that the team and other staff value so highly shine out. The school adviser says of the school, 'an ethos of love and care shines out'. This was apparent during the inspection, where I observed the nurture and care which extend across the 'school family'.

Both you and the deputy headteacher work in a highly effective manner to provide a good quality of education for the children at Balderstone St Leonard's. You receive support from the church and from a dedicated board of governors who are well informed and provide a broad range of skills to support school improvement.

You benefit from a highly supportive and hard-working staff team. All members of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they were proud to be members of staff and felt that the school was well led and managed.

The parents and carers with whom I spoke, and all those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, hold the school in high regard. A typical parental view was, 'The staff work above and beyond their role and actually overwhelm me with their love of helping each and every child to develop in their own unique way. The staff truly know our children.'

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they are polite, thoughtful and caring. Pupils value the broad range of opportunities provided for them to represent their school in positions such as school councillors and British values ambassadors. Your 'salt and light' group works with staff and the church to develop further the religious aspects of school life. A representative comment from pupils was, 'Everybody has a voice.'

Following the last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to develop pupils' reading skills. Leaders have addressed this issue in a most effective manner, ensuring that pupils enjoy regular access to a wide range of literature across the curriculum. As a result, pupils' most recent published performance information shows that attainment is above that seen nationally at both the expected and higher levels by the end of key stage 2.

Additionally, inspectors asked leaders to ensure that information about pupils' progress is used effectively to make sure tasks are hard enough for pupils, and they receive precise information about what teachers expect of them. Through focused monitoring of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science, and regular feedback to staff, leaders are addressing this issue and pupils' performance is of a high standard. However, you are aware that further work is necessary to ensure that pupils receive the same high level of challenge in subjects in the wider curriculum.

During the inspection, we discussed areas where further work is needed in your ongoing school improvement. In writing, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to practise their skills across other subject areas. Additionally, leaders are not ensuring that pupils' outcomes in the wider curriculum subjects reflect the high standards seen in English, science and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's policies and procedures are up to date and staff and governors understand their role in keeping pupils safe. The school site is secure. Vigilant staff ensure that visitors are checked on entry and provide them with valuable information relating to health and safety.

Pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe both in the wider world and online. This is because they have many opportunities to learn about personal and online safety. Pupils have a clear understanding of, and respect for, equality and diversity. A typical comment reflecting the views of others spoken with during the inspection noted, 'We are inclusive here. Our school is a family. It emphasizes equality.'

Older pupils contribute effectively to safety in school by supporting younger pupils both in school and in the playground. They say that they are proud to act as positive role models.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I shared with you a number of lines of enquiry. These did not come as a surprise to you because leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the school in a clear and concise manner. You set clear targets for improvement and measure the impact of this work in an effective manner.
- The first line of enquiry considered whether leaders have been successful in raising the achievement of key stage 2 pupils in writing. This is because their progress has not been consistently high in the past. Leaders are aware of this issue and have addressed it in their own improvement planning. Leaders work with teachers to look at the planning and assessment of writing and have introduced a new system for the teaching of this subject. Pupils are particularly proud to produce good-quality, extended pieces of writing in their 'wow books'. Teachers now take part in regular moderation of writing, both in school and together with other schools. As a result, the school's most recent published performance information shows that pupils' progress in writing has improved and attainment for most pupils is higher than that seen nationally, both at the expected and the higher levels at key stage 2.
- While most pupils are making good progress in writing, this is not always the case for the middle-ability group of learners in key stage 2, whose performance over time has been below that of other learners. Leaders and teachers are not providing enough opportunities for this group to develop their skills when writing in subjects across the wider curriculum.
- My next line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring that the standard of performance remains high in the early years. Over time, leaders and teachers have worked diligently to enhance provision for children in the early years. Leaders have introduced a pre-school to ensure that children are well prepared for the expectations of the Reception Year. You have improved the accuracy of systems for assessing progress. As a result, teachers ensure that children receive the opportunities they need to develop their learning. Teachers have also transformed the learning environment to ensure that children have access to high-quality learning in all aspects of the early years curriculum. Leaders and teachers work closely with experts from the local authority to ensure that the provision for the children is strong. They use published performance information effectively to ensure that children receive additional support in the areas in which they struggle most. As a result, children in the early years are confident and happy. The school's most recent published performance information for 2017 shows that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development remains above that seen nationally. Additionally, the proportion of children achieving the higher levels in the mathematics and writing early learning goals is also above that seen nationally.
- Finally, I considered how leaders ensure a broad and balanced curriculum to provide opportunities for pupils to achieve at an equally high level in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. You are working successfully with the deputy headteacher and with staff to develop a new and innovative curriculum. This is to ensure that pupils are excited and engaged in their learning and that performance in all subjects in the wider curriculum is of the same high

standard as that achieved in English, mathematics and science.

- The new curriculum has a clear vision and intention which is to design learning opportunities which meets the needs of all pupils. You have planned 'irresistible learning experiences' which allow pupils to see the awe and wonder in the world. Leaders are introducing the new curriculum effectively, ensuring that pupils' knowledge, skills, understanding and experiences are being developed well. You ensure that all members of staff are involved in the creation of the new curriculum and are justly proud of the joint steps that you have taken to begin its implementation.
- You are particularly proud of the achievements of pupils in physical education and sport. Pupils greatly enjoy beginning the school day with a 'daily mile' run around the school field. Staff run alongside the pupils and pupils receive encouragement from parents who stay to observe the event. This activity has greatly improved pupils' stamina and their concentration in class. Pupils are proud to represent their school as sports ambassadors and 'change for life' champions. A typical comment was, 'We inspire people to live healthier lives.' As a result of this focus on sport, the school has received a gold award for physical education and sporting achievements. Teachers use the 'daily mile' as an opportunity to talk with parents and develop community links.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further embed the new curriculum to ensure that outcomes in subjects in the wider curriculum are at the same high level as those reached in English, mathematics and science
- key stage 2 pupils, most notably those in the middle-ability range, receive a broad range of opportunities to develop further their writing skills across the curriculum.

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

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss issues relating to school improvement and procedures to keep pupils safe. I also met with a member of the clergy and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with the school's business manager about staff recruitment procedures. I also spoke with the school's improvement adviser from the local authority. I had a formal discussion with a group of pupils about their personal development, behaviour and welfare. We also discussed their learning.

Accompanied by you, I visited all classes across the school and joined a collective worship session. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, at lunch, during their 'daily mile' run and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work and reviewed documents, including your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children. I also examined the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning and current performance information. I considered 12 responses to Ofsted's staff survey, 37 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, and 16 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, including 15 free-text responses. I also considered information posted on the school's website and the school's own survey information.