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Mr Jonathan Dryland
Headteacher
Kirkham St Michael's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Dryland

Short inspection of Kirkham St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 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 March 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 quickly gained the confidence of staff, parents and carers, and pupils when you took up post in September 2016. You have inspired them greatly, encouraging them to aim higher and giving them the guidance, support and training they need to do so. You and your deputy form a strong leadership team. Subject leaders are growing in effectiveness and I also saw strong teamwork among staff. All of this is improving teaching and learning. Everyone talked about their passion for securing an exciting curriculum that helps pupils develop as well as they can, personally and academically. Currently, not enough pupils achieve greater depth in learning in different subjects. The discussions I had with subject leaders, their clarity of thinking and their action plans showed that you are all working on this.

There is a supportive family feeling to the school. Parents say that 'open door here really means open door'. They talk about a 'committed and skilled leadership team' and say that staff are 'very dedicated and caring'. They welcome your approach, saying it has transformed the school and led to greatly improved behaviour and learning. They fully support your vision for the school, as do governors, staff and pupils, all of whom say that they are proud to be part of this improving school. In the past year or so, many pupils have joined the school in different year groups as numbers continue to grow. It is testimony to you and the staff that these pupils say that they are happy and settled, and that they feel a part of their new school.

The previous inspection report asked the school to improve teaching and progress, including in phonics, spelling and handwriting in key stage 1. Handwriting is neat and legible throughout the school. Pupils present their work well and the teaching of phonics is effective. All of this was evident when, together, you and I looked at pupils' books and observed a phonics session, and when I looked at books with your deputy. Standards in phonics have risen in the past two years and pupils use their phonics skills well when reading.

The previous report also asked the school to improve the role of middle leaders. Through training, time to manage their subjects, and opportunities to check teaching and learning in them, subject leaders now have a greater influence on how, and how well, their subjects are taught. Work to deliver the school's aim of measuring how well pupils learn in each subject is well under way. There is a strong focus on ensuring that any assessments are accurate and that they inform planning and lead to better progress for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are detailed and fit for purpose, and that all incidents are recorded and followed up. A culture of vigilance exists throughout the school because you have ensured that all staff see safeguarding as a high priority. Where it has been necessary to work with external agencies to safeguard pupils, you have acted swiftly and appropriately.

Staff, governors and volunteers have completed all relevant training. Recruiting and vetting procedures are thorough and systematically maintained. Pupils report that they feel very safe in school and know that they can speak to any member of staff should they have any concerns. They are very clear about how to keep safe when using the internet and they know how to avoid falling victim to cyber bullying. For example, they explained how they could use the dolphin on their screens to raise the alarm should they be directed to or find an unsuitable site.

Fire drills take place regularly and suitable risk assessments are carried out for all relevant activities, including visits out of school. Pupils receive and understand guidance on potential risks and how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They are adamant that there is no longer any form of bullying in the school, acknowledging that there had been in the past. All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, reported that their children are happy at school. Virtually all said that their children are safe and well cared for.

A very small number of parents expressed some concerns about the behaviour of a few pupils, which they felt had a detrimental effect on others. We discussed the level of support you provide for pupils who find it a challenge to manage their own behaviour. I am satisfied that appropriate systems are in place to keep everyone safe. I was impressed by the pupils' tolerance and strong level of understanding towards others, including classmates who find it difficult conforming to school routines.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I investigated a number of lines of enquiry to decide whether the school remained good. I looked at why progress in reading was weaker than in writing or mathematics in 2018, and what it was that made writing so strong. Within this, I also looked at progress in key stage 1.
- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You explained clearly why reading was weaker last year, giving convincing examples relating to individual pupils, changes in the year group and the effect of staff absence. You also showed me how well you and your deputy are helping these pupils, now in Year 3, to close gaps in their learning.
- Pupils say that they enjoy reading and that they read in order to learn in different subjects, as well as for pleasure. Much work is in place to help pupils understand how to look for meaning behind the written word, thus improving their comprehension skills.
- From looking at a range of books across different subjects, I found that staff successfully encourage pupils to use their writing skills well in all of their writing. Staff ensure that pupils understand how to write in different styles, depending on whom they are writing for, and why.
- I saw examples of reports, reflective writing, writing in role as another person, as well as poetry and re-telling of stories. Within each style of writing, there is a clear focus on using a wide range of vocabulary and the correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. All these things help to make pupils' writing easy to read.
- Another line of enquiry looked at why persistent absence had risen and why exclusions were higher than the national average. You clearly use exclusion only as a very last resort and can demonstrate that every effort is made to avoid it. I noted that you follow up all absences meticulously to ensure that pupils are safe, and that persistent absence is now reducing.
- Attendance is above the national average because pupils want to come to school. They told me that teachers make learning fun. Their parents say that they are excited to get to school. I saw some excellent behaviour in lessons, around the school and at playtime and lunchtime.
- Pupils work together exceedingly well, supporting each other with their learning. I saw this as I visited classrooms. For example, in mathematics, pupils helped each other to understand calculations involving fractions and decimals.
- When talking to me, pupils showed a high degree of maturity and an excellent understanding of why good behaviour is important. They discussed rules, rewards and sanctions and saw them as necessary and fair.
- A third line of enquiry looked at leadership and management, and specifically the impact on teaching and learning, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I also looked at clarity and focus in respect of progress in different subjects.
- Leaders' aspirations are clearly for all pupils to achieve well in all subjects. The

strong inclusion team, of which you are a part, has enabled the provision for special educational needs to remain good, in the absence of the special educational needs coordinator due to illness. Thus, pupils with SEND continue to make the same good progress as other pupils.

- You, your deputy and the subject leaders use the word 'passion' frequently when talking about creating an exciting curriculum that fully meets the needs of the pupils in your school. Determined to help each pupil achieve their best, you are successfully building a curriculum that takes account of pupils' different backgrounds and interests, for example in sports and the arts.
- Teachers help pupils to realise that what they learn in one subject helps them in another. They also open pupils' minds to the range of occupations they might pursue when they grow up. For example, pupils talked enthusiastically about the aspiration week and how they learned about jobs as diverse as those of plumbers, tree surgeons, vets and architects.
- Pupils reported that what they achieve outside school is also valued highly, making them feel that everything they learn is worthwhile. You have transmitted to the staff your clarity of thinking about the curriculum, the links between different subjects and the need to ensure depth of learning as well as coverage of the national curriculum.
- Subject leaders look at current teaching and learning in their subject, at what should improve and how to bring that improvement about. They use the information well to plan the next steps in their subjects. They talk about pupils having different strengths in different areas and how they are beginning to capitalise on the pupils' talents and interests to help them do even better.
- The improvements in the past two years, taken alongside what I found when following my key lines of enquiry, show that you have established strong capacity for further improvement within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders and teachers enable more pupils to achieve greater depth in their learning.

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

Doris Bell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and we talked about the improvements that have been made since the previous inspection. I also considered your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness and your school improvement plan. I checked all safeguarding records, including your recruitment and vetting procedures. I held discussions with governors, the local authority, subject leaders, parents and pupils. I visited several lessons and sampled pupils' books with you and with the deputy headteacher. I took account of the 27 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils, the 35 responses from parents to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, and the 15 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.