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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Julie Green
Baxenden St John's Church of England Primary School
Church Avenue
Baxenden
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 2RQ

Dear Mrs Green

Short inspection of Baxenden St John'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 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.

Since your recent promotion from deputy headteacher to headteacher, you have built effectively upon the work of your predecessor. Staff and governors share your aspirations for every pupil to achieve well in a happy and caring environment, with a strong Christian ethos. You lead the school with determination and passion and are held in high regard by staff, parents and governors. You have a clear vision for moving the school forward. You place importance on professional development to ensure that staff have the skills to drive forward improvements at a pace. You promote the well-being of staff to ensure that they have a good work-life balance. Together with your acting deputy headteacher, you have an accurate view of the school and rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning.

You put an emphasis on nurturing the whole child. You and your team do this effectively through the helpful relationships that adults have with pupils and also through the work that you do in supporting families. Staff are proud to be part of this school; they feel able to share their ideas. There is strong teamwork among the staff. Through your support and encouragement, they feel empowered to develop their roles in education. Staff morale at this school is high.

Parents have confidence and trust in the leadership of this school. Relationships are strong. Parents rightly believe that their children are safe and are making good progress. Parents find the staff approachable and have confidence in the school's

leaders. You are committed to involving parents in their children's education. One parent wrote: 'We are so proud of this school and its values, which are carried through into the classroom and beyond.'

As we toured the school together, behaviour was good. Pupils showed respect and demonstrated strong supportive relationships with teachers, teaching assistants and also with each other. They were keen to talk to me. Pupils told me about the range of trips and out-of-school activities that the school provides to broaden their experiences and ignite their passion for learning. Pupils contribute to decision-making, for example as elected members of the school council and 'eco schools'. Older pupils run clubs for the enjoyment of others in the school.

Subject leaders are passionate about developing their subject. They have developed their leadership roles through training and support. They regularly monitor pupils' work, talk with pupils about their learning and provide information to governors about their subjects. Although much work has taken place, the role of middle leaders of foundation subjects is not fully developed. Some subject leaders are also new to their roles. Assessment of foundation subjects has recently been introduced and is not embedded.

Governors are ambitious for the school and passionate about the strong church and community ethos. They attend a range of appropriate training and are developing their knowledge to give effective support to leaders. Minutes of governors' meetings show that governors ask relevant questions about pupils' progress and performance. Governors act as a critical friend and are beginning to offer good levels of support and challenge. However, there have been recent changes to the governing board, with several relatively new governors. As such, they have not checked for themselves the information presented to them by the headteacher.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is a priority at this school. You and your committed staff work hard to ensure that safeguarding is of the highest quality. Staff know pupils and their families well and listen actively to their views. All parents who made their views known expressed confidence in the school's ability to protect and care for their children effectively. The headteacher and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is up to date for all adults who work in school. Frequent training updates, reflecting the latest guidance, are shared regularly with staff. This ensures that they know precisely what to do if they are concerned about a pupil. The school site is safe and secure and visitors' credentials are checked.

Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school and that there is always an adult they can go to for help. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying. They say that bullying is rare, and they are confident that any incidents are dealt with effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They have a good knowledge of 'stranger danger', road safety and staying safe online.

Inspection findings

- I looked initially at how effectively leaders and governors had addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. You were asked to improve the quality of teaching and increase progress by checking that tasks meet all abilities and pupils are well supported. The leadership team took swift action to address this issue. A range of strategies were put into place, including training for staff and the introduction of challenge tasks into every lesson. Pupils are suitably challenged in their learning with tasks well matched to their needs. In mathematics, bronze, silver and gold tasks enabled pupils to solve challenging problems. Teachers and teaching assistants were on hand to give valuable guidance and support.
- Given the recent changes in school leadership, I wanted to check how well leaders were moving the school forward. You left me with no doubts that you are a very capable leader who cares passionately about your school. Together with your acting deputy headteacher, you have galvanised the staff, creating a new sense of purpose for the school. Outcomes at all key stages are strong. Nevertheless, you have put in place clear plans to improve progress and outcomes further. Your self-evaluation is accurate and honest. The school improvement plan is focused on the school's key priorities. The staff, parents, pupils and governors are fully on board with you as you embark on the next stage of your school's journey.
- My next line of enquiry was to look at how effectively mathematics teaching ensured that pupils attained the higher standards they are capable of. For the past two years, the proportion of pupils in key stage 2 who attained the higher standard in mathematics has been much lower than in reading and writing. Analysis of pupils' work showed you that pupils' reasoning skills were less well developed, particularly when it came to solving the more complex problems. You took action and raised the skills of your teaching staff. Pupils' books show that they are given frequent opportunities to extend their thinking, reasoning and solve a range of challenging problems. In mathematics in key stage 2, the most able pupils were able to apply their reasoning skills to solve problems involving fractions. In-school data for current pupils shows that a greater proportion of pupils are on track to exceed age-related expectations in mathematics in all year groups.
- The last line of enquiry was to look at the school curriculum to see whether pupils are making strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. The curriculum is enriched to provide fun and unique learning experiences for all pupils. Breakfast club and a wide range of after-school clubs make a valuable contribution to pupils' social and personal development. Learning environments and displays around school are bright and vibrant and highlight the high standard of pupils' work. Basic skills are reinforced in other subject areas, ensuring high standards of writing across the curriculum. You and your subject leaders clearly identify how the curriculum is tailored to the needs of your pupils. You have linked it to the interests of the pupils. You also use the local community as a rich learning resource. You ensure that learning is meaningful for pupils. Year 6 pupils explained how they enjoyed taking part in

the remembrance service at the local church and singing for the congregation as part of their learning about the Second World War.

- Outdoor learning across all subjects is integral to your school's curriculum. For example, you have put a stage into the local field which is used to enact historical events, amongst other learning activities. You spoke to me of how you endeavour to develop confident, independent learners – certainly the children I spoke to demonstrated this. Your well-planned curriculum is one of the many reasons that pupils enjoy coming to school every day.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the work of foundation subject leaders is further developed to have an even greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment
- governors draw on a wide range of independently verified information when judging progress against school improvement priorities.

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

Aleksandra Hartshorne
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leader, a group of teachers and teaching assistants, governors and the school improvement adviser from the local authority. I also met with a group of your subject leaders and together we looked at pupils' workbooks. You and I visited classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils and talked with pupils in lessons. I also had a discussion with a group of 12 pupils from Years 1 to 6. I considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance, plans for improvement and minutes of governing body meetings. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record. I also reviewed the information available on the school's website.

I gathered views from parents and took account of 46 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I received 17 free-text responses from parents and results of the staff and pupil questionnaires.