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Dear Mrs McIlwain

Short inspection of Downholland-Haskayne Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 September 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 have faced some considerable challenges in the last two years, arising from the effect of a falling roll. You, and the governing body, have taken carefully considered and effective action to ensure the sustainability of the school and to continue to provide pupils with a good-quality education.

One of the ways you have secured sustainability is your comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is gained by your effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education that the school provides. You frequently share this information with governors, who have a sharp understanding of the effectiveness of the school. As a result, you have identified the correct priorities and actions to continue to improve the school. Added to this, you have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These areas for improvement related to the guidance given to pupils to improve their work and improving the quality of their writing.

You have taken advantage of the additional support you sought from the local authority to develop effectively the quality of teaching across the school. The restructuring of the deployment of staff has ensured the best use of their skills and knowledge. The secondment of a new deputy headteacher has strengthened the quality of teaching in school, particularly in writing and mathematics. Additional training for teachers and teaching assistants has enhanced their knowledge and understanding of effective strategies to teach writing. Effective partnership working, with the other small school at

which you are also the headteacher, provides additional opportunities for teachers to share expertise, learn from each other and check the accuracy of their assessments. As a result, work in pupils' books shows that they develop a secure knowledge of the spelling, punctuation and grammar and apply this knowledge effectively to write well in other subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They attend regularly, in line with the national average for primary schools. The pupils with whom I spoke say that they feel safe in school and that learning is fun. They say that although the work is sometimes hard, teachers and teaching assistants help them. Pupils particularly like the challenges in mathematics, especially in algebra. Pupils also speak eloquently about their love of reading. Older pupils often care for and help younger pupils to learn. Pupils across all year groups play collaboratively and harmoniously together during well-supervised playtimes. Pupils said that bullying is rare, but it sometimes occurs when pupils fall out with each other. They are confident that when it does occur teachers and other members of staff take swift action to address their concerns.

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who spoke with inspectors, or who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, have extremely positive views about the school. Parents are effusive about the school's nurturing ethos and how well staff know their children. This was exemplified in such comments as: 'This school never gives up on any child' and 'teachers nurture pupils' development and help them succeed'. A very small number of parents raised a concern about bullying in school. However, no evidence was found to substantiate this concern during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are of a high quality and that they are fit for purpose. Knowledgeable staff meticulously implement the school's policies relating to safeguarding. This is because they are well trained and have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding, including that relating to online safety. Appropriate checks ensure the suitability of staff and governors to work with children.

Staff are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Records are appropriate and meticulously kept. Leaders share information with parents and appropriate authorities effectively to ensure pupils' safety. Governors ensure that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection.

Inspection findings

- In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of the school's culture of safeguarding, the inspection focused on a small number of key lines of enquiry. These lines of enquiry paid particular attention to the quality of teaching in school, the impact of leaders' actions to improve the quality of pupils' writing, and the effectiveness of the design of the curriculum to promote pupils' knowledge and understanding in greater depth. Additionally, the lines of enquiry considered the reasons behind pupils making such strong progress as readers from their starting points.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They carry out frequent and accurate

assessments and know pupils' strengths and weaknesses well, particularly in English and mathematics. They make good use of this information to promote learning in English and mathematics. Well-considered tasks systematically build upon pupils' prior knowledge and skills, irrespective of their age. As a result, the most able pupils receive the challenge that they need to develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth. However, in subjects other than English and mathematics tasks are not as closely matched to pupils' levels of understanding. As a result, the promotion of deeper learning for the most able pupils is not as well developed in these subjects.

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. As a result, they routinely use correct technical vocabulary to promote pupils' development of knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of questioning to consolidate pupils' learning. They carefully check pupils' understanding by asking them to explain how they arrived at their answers. Consequently, pupils are used to being asked about their work and confidently explained to the inspector what they had been learning about. For example, pupils gave a clear definition and exemplification of the use of modal and imperative verbs.
- Teachers creatively link themes across the curriculum to promote important aspects of learning. For example, a recent local history study developed pupils' knowledge of the importance of stabling at local stately homes. Pupils understood the importance of horses in war and the need to train cavalry soldiers who used horses requisitioned from the community. This history study was linked to reading 'War horse' written by Michael Morpurgo. Pupils also developed their emotive and persuasive writing skills. They wrote letters either as a volunteer who wanted to serve their country with their horse or a distressed owner who missed their animal.
- Leaders have refined the school's curriculum to include a stronger focus on writing. This has been complemented by appropriate training for staff that has developed their knowledge and understanding of effective strategies that promote the development of pupils' writing skills.
- Improvements to monitoring pupils' achievement ensure that teachers and leaders have a detailed understanding of pupils' attainment and progress in writing. Leaders use this information successfully to identify any gaps in pupils' learning. They also closely evaluate the impact of teachers' actions to address those gaps and to promote pupils' progress. The school's own assessment information, and the work in pupils' books, shows that the quality of pupils' writing is improving rapidly. For example, some pupils who began the year writing in short, simple sentences that were not always correctly punctuated have made good progress. As a result, they now use semi-colons correctly to separate clauses in extended texts, such as fact sheets about members of their favourite pop groups.
- Following the reduction of the number of classes from three to two, leaders have reviewed and amended the design of the school's curriculum. This was to safeguard the full coverage of the national curriculum. Carefully considered plans ensure the progression of subject knowledge over a key stage, without the repetition of any topic. Leaders are closely monitoring the effectiveness of these changes to check that they are having the desired impact on pupils' learning. The curriculum plans published on the school's website identify the theme of each half-term's study. However, they are not detailed enough to show parents and others the content of what is being taught

and the intended progression of subject knowledge.

- Reading continues to be a strength of the school. From the outset, pupils are given a secure foundation in the use of synthetic phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) to help them read well. This is because they are taught systematically by skilled teachers, and teaching assistants. They follow a carefully planned and well-resourced plan that ensures consistency of approach and high expectations. Younger pupils' prowess in reading is further enhanced by reading books that are closely matched to the phase of phonics that they are learning. Frequent practice in reading across all year groups further promotes pupils' love of reading. As a result, pupils are avid readers and able to confidently talk about their favourite authors and choice of book.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged in subjects other than English and mathematics to extend their knowledge and understanding at greater depth
- the curriculum information shared with parents and published on the school's website is accurate and fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, and the school's special educational needs coordinator. I held meetings with a group of governors, including the chair, and with two local authority advisers who work with your school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school and listened to readers from key stages 1 and 2. I took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents, Parent View, and spoke with several parents during the day. There were no responses to the online questionnaires for staff or pupils.

I visited classrooms with you to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in books, on display and in learning journeys. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, and attainment. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation documentation, curriculum planning and development plans and other policies. I looked at provision for safeguarding and evaluated the impact of the school's policies, procedures and records to keep children safe, including while they are online.

