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Mr John Littler
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Dear Mr Littler

Short inspection of Barrow Hall Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Pupils are very proud of the school. They like the teachers and found it really difficult to think of anything they would like to improve about the school. Pupils excitedly told me how well they were doing in learning to play the guitar, which all pupils are encouraged to do. Many also learn to play keyboards and all enjoy singing. Pupils' conduct in class is excellent. They listen carefully to the teachers and try their best to produce work of a high standard, especially in their written work. Pupils have many enrichment activities beyond the taught curriculum. Choir is a very popular club, along with street dance, cheerleading and many sports clubs.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the work of leaders and teachers. They are very pleased they chose the school and are confident their children are happy and safe and are cared for exceptionally well. Pupils thrive in their learning and personal development because teachers make sure they provide the very best experiences for them. Almost all parents would recommend the school to another parent.

You have successfully created a culture where everyone works together as one united

team with a focus on the school's four core values of 'respect, resilience, ambition and happiness'. You listened to and acted upon the views of governors, staff and pupils in the design of the new building, which has energised staff and pupils to follow their dreams. You and the leadership team have restructured the curriculum. Activities for pupils are designed to be interesting, at times exciting, often challenging, and geared to achieving the school's new vision statement, 'learning for life'. As a result, pupils at Barrow Hall are exceptionally well prepared to continue their learning in secondary school, and for life in modern Britain.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve standards in reading and writing, especially for the most able pupils. As part of this inspection I focused on the school's work to bring about these improvements. The teaching of writing is now a strength of the school's work. A significant contribution to this is teachers now planning for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing in all subjects and in accordance with the school's assessment policy, marking pupils' work with the same attention to accuracy in spelling, grammar and handwriting as they would in English books. Pupils respond to the challenges teachers set and are keen to improve their work through using different or better vocabulary. You have improved pupils' reading skills, especially for the most able pupils and for boys. One way in which you have done this is by making sure that all pupils, irrespective of their age or ability, read more-challenging texts and become engrossed in a story.

There is a small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school, but I was concerned that, overall, in 2018 by the end of Year 6 these pupils made far less progress in mathematics than they did in reading or writing. These results were affected by a small number of pupils who started in the school much later than everyone else and had previously learned very little mathematics. During this inspection, I wanted to check on the progress all pupils are making in mathematics, particularly across key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff, including governors, are trained to the same high standard in the latest guidance on how to keep children safe because all staff complete online training resources. Safeguarding leaders provide further half-termly updates and you check that staff know the key changes through quick quizzes to keep safeguarding at the forefront of their minds. Teachers who were asked during the inspection know the correct procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil.

Some governors and senior leaders have completed safer recruitment training, and thorough pre-employment checks are carried out before anyone starts work in the school. As a result, you are confident that anyone working with pupils is safe to do so.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and healthy through personal, social and health education. Pupils know how to stay safe when using computers. They know about different forms of bullying but say bullying does not happen at this school. Pupils have a good awareness of what it is like to be, or to feel, different. They say

everyone is welcome and 'no-one is made to feel uncomfortable for being who they are' at Barrow Hall. They proudly told me about the school's new gender-neutral toilets.

Inspection findings

- The improvements to the curriculum have been helped by the appointment of leaders for each subject. There is a specific time allocated for each subject over the week. The subject leaders with whom I met during the inspection are passionate about their responsibilities and provide excellent support for colleagues. Leaders visit classes to see teaching; they model lessons for others to observe and produce high-quality resources and plan imaginative ways of introducing a topic to engage pupils. Teaching is consistently of the same high standard across all classes in each year group.
- You have improved pupils' writing skills across the school. Pupils routinely write extended pieces of work in a range of subjects. For example, in art pupils find out about different artists and write about famous works of art, before producing their own art work. In science, pupils write about their scientific investigations, form hypotheses, record measurements and look for and explain any patterns they find. In Spanish, key stage 2 pupils write complete sentences using key words correctly and with correct punctuation.
- In line with the school's policy, teachers check pupils' work carefully to make sure spelling and grammatical errors are corrected. Pupils are praised for their good handwriting, correct letter formation and neat work, with the date and titles underlined to meet the high expectations of presentation. High-quality written work is a priority in all subjects. Teachers routinely plan writing activities for pupils that have a clear context. As a result, pupils see the purpose of their writing. For example, Year 2 pupils in science used persuasive writing in a letter about recycling.
- You have given reading development a high priority from the Reception Year to Year 6. Pupils showed empathy with characters and situations from stories they were reading together in class. For example, pupils in Year 6 explained the feelings of a boy being bullied for a facial disfigurement, and pupils in Year 5 had a good understanding of racial discrimination from their reading on apartheid.
- Pupils were engrossed in their stories, including boys who have done less well than girls in the past in reading. Pupils told me they are expected to read at home at least three times each week, but most told me they read every night because they enjoy reading.
- Weaker readers receive good support to help them to improve, including through their reading partner. These volunteers include parents and grandparents, whom leaders have trained in how to help pupils to improve their reading. Pupils use their excellent phonics knowledge to help them to sound out new or unfamiliar words.
- Teaching in mathematics is improving as teachers become more confident in teaching problem-solving skills and questioning pupils to improve their skills in reasoning. Pupils in Year 6 worked with interest as they tried to find 'what number am I?' given a series of clues. Some were confident in considering alternative

strategies as they worked exceptionally well in pairs or as a group. Disadvantaged pupils now do equally as well as their classmates in mathematics.

- Leaders carefully analysed mathematics test papers to see where teaching could be further improved. From this analysis, leaders identified that written calculation methods were a relative weakness. Some teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts. A few pupils struggle to retain the key information they need to become successful mathematicians, such as the names of shapes and the properties of special quadrilaterals.
- Leaders work collaboratively with a group of schools in the area to support each other in school improvement. For example, other schools benefit from the expertise of this school's early years leader and the leader of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to help to improve schools in the local authority and beyond.
- Governors and the school improvement partner have the necessary skills and experience to challenge leaders and to make sure the school continues to improve. Governors use the school improvement plan as a working document to hold leaders to account for their allocated activities, check improvements are having the desired effect and that they are happening quickly enough.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to embed the improvements to their practice in the teaching of reading so more pupils achieve a high standard in this skill
- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to deepen further their understanding of mathematical concepts.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, staff, pupils, a group of governors, the school improvement partner and a representative from the local authority. At the start of the day we toured the school to look at how you used the new building to create spaces for pupils to read. You and one of the phase leaders joined me in visits to classrooms to look at the impact of the work in improving reading and mathematics, particularly in

key stage 2. I and the leader for English looked at pupils' writing across the curriculum. A range of documentation was considered, including information about safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's improvement plan. I took account of the 392 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, which included 81 written comments from parents and carers. There were no responses to the staff or pupil surveys.