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Mr Andrew Howard
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Dear Mr Howard

Short inspection of Legh Vale Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your staff are strongly committed to making a positive difference to the lives of pupils and families in the school community. With your leadership team, you have created a happy school where pupils feel safe and are eager to learn. Staff and governors are extremely proud to belong to the school, which is a tribute to the very good relationships that you have established.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive. Those who responded to Ofsted's survey Parent View enthused about the school. An example typical of many was:

'My children are highly motivated and love going to school which is due to the excellent support and guidance received from the staff. We feel extremely proud that our children are part of such a wonderful school.'

Pupils also speak very highly of Legh Vale Primary School. They know that staff 'really care' about them and make sure that there are 'lots of fun and exciting things to do'. Pupils especially value the wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer, as well as the trips and visitors to the school that are organised to enrich their learning.

From the moment that they start the school day to the time that they leave to go home, pupils are encouraged to try their best. They concentrate hard in lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary in and around the school. This is because pupils know what is expected of them. In lessons, pupils enjoy learning. They are well supported to improve

their work, which was an area to work on from the last inspection. Since then, teachers have been trained to ask questions to check on pupils' understanding. Teachers quickly intervene when pupils need extra help, to make sure that learning does not slow down. Teachers regularly review the progress that pupils make. Teachers refine their plans to meet the needs of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). By the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress is above average, especially in reading.

At the previous inspection, you were also asked to develop the role of subject leaders to improve teaching across the curriculum. You have done a significant amount of work to make sure that middle leaders plan the curriculum more effectively. There are increased opportunities to extend and deepen pupils' knowledge and skills in a range of subjects. Middle leaders have time to monitor their subject areas regularly by checking pupils' work, observing in lessons and talking to other staff. Middle leaders work closely with other schools to share good practice. They report back to governors about the progress they are making to implement their action plans. However, curriculum overviews on the school's website do not reflect the interesting work in pupils' books and on display around the school. These do not give a clear picture of all subjects being taught. Several areas of the curriculum are being revised.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date and there are well-established systems in place to keep pupils safe. The new child protection policy fully meets requirements, although it was not on the website at the start of the inspection. This was remedied by the end of the day.

Pupils are confident that adults in the school will help them if they have a problem and will deal with it quickly. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum and in assemblies. For example, they learn about how to stay safe online and about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Pupils are taught to recognise different types of bullying and how to respond to this by being 'an upstander' and not 'a bystander'. They are well prepared to deal with any incidents if they occur.

Records viewed in the inspection showed that, where pupils are potentially vulnerable, swift action is taken to protect them from harm. Staff work closely with families and outside agencies to help and protect pupils. You have worked hard to ensure that the attendance of all pupils is good. You take steps to improve this if it falls behind. These actions are successful. Attendance is above average compared to all schools nationally.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on specific lines of enquiry. The first line of enquiry was whether the most able pupils were being sufficiently challenged in writing and mathematics in key stage 2. A smaller-than-average number of pupils reached greater depth in writing or the higher standard in mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2018. You identified writing as a key area for development and addressed it robustly. You have deployed staff with great care, to secure maximum adult support. A strong focus

on improving grammar, punctuation and spelling means that pupils are more accurate in their writing. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They take pride in their work, which is well presented and neatly written. Pupils develop stamina in their writing as they progress through key stage 2. They are able to write for different purposes. They also apply their writing skills in subjects other than English. All these improvements have made a positive difference; more pupils are achieving the expected standards in writing. However, opportunities for pupils to extend their vocabulary or draw on a rich breadth of reading experiences that they can apply to their writing are not exploited. For example, pupils use words from their history topic on the Romans in their writing, but do not fully understand their meaning.

- In mathematics, teachers help to develop pupils' fluency and confidence well. Pupils' books show that, over time, teachers build pupils' knowledge incrementally. There is consistency in the way that mathematics is taught. Teachers deepen pupils' understanding by challenging them to give reasons for their answers. Pupils apply logic to solve mathematical problems and to test out their knowledge. Your assessments and pupils' books show that progress in mathematics is strong.
- Next, I considered whether the support for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 was helping them to catch up quickly in reading, writing and mathematics. Published data in 2018 showed that there were gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally in these subjects. This group of pupils make strong progress, especially in reading and mathematics. Starting points for some pupils are often very low and it takes longer for them to catch up. However, the difference diminishes as pupils move through the school. This is because the pupil premium funding is used wisely to enable lower-attaining pupils to make accelerated progress.
- The third focus for the inspection was to look at whether children in early years are making enough progress from their starting points. Children's development, especially that of boys, has been below average for the last two years at the end of Reception. Children's attainment on entry to the school is low. Pupils often arrive needing a lot of extra support to develop their social and language skills. In the nurturing environment, expectations of what children need in order to thrive and make progress are quickly established. Parents are involved and supported, so that learning can continue at home. Teachers design learning activities that enthuse all children, but especially boys. These are having a positive impact. The gap between boys and girls is narrowing. During the inspection, boys were observed making competent use of their understanding about the sounds which letters make to read and write new, simple words. However, there is still some way to go until they have caught up with other children nationally. This is in part because there are not sufficient opportunities to help children in Nursery and Reception to understand the context of their learning. For example, they easily recognise the sounds that make up a word but are not stretched further by exploring the meaning of words or how to use them in a sentence.
- Finally, I reviewed governors' understanding of their statutory duties to publish information about the school. Governors are passionate about the school and want it to be the best that it can be. They have a good oversight of its strengths and areas for improvement. They regularly attend training and make sure that they recruit new governors who can make a valuable contribution to the school. At the start of the inspection, the information published on the website did not meet requirements. By the end of the inspection most of the missing information had been added. Governors

are already taking action to make sure that a system is set up to check the website regularly.

- A notable feature of the school is the attention to learning and achievement outside of the classroom. The facilities for physical activity and outdoor learning and teaching about the environment are superb and put to excellent use. Pupils participate regularly in sport and are successful in competitive events. You make sure, however, that pupils are recognised for their commitment and involvement as much as for winning competitions. Other events include musical celebrations and performing arts within the community. Your focus on helping pupils to grow into well-rounded individuals who can make a positive contribution to society is at the heart of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of children, especially boys, attain a good level of development by the end of Reception
- teachers continue to help pupils to deepen their knowledge and skills in English, so that more of them attain greater depth in writing by the end of key stage 2
- information on the school's website fully meets requirements and reflects the good work that is being delivered in the school.

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

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Parkinson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and some subject leaders. I met with the school business manager and members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I visited several classes with you to observe teaching and learning. Together with some teachers, I looked at pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils from across the school. I took account of the 114 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and evaluated 57 free-text responses from parents. I considered the 28 responses from staff to the Ofsted online questionnaire and 58 responses from pupils. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I viewed a range of information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding document and I undertook a review of the school's website.