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Mrs Sandra Hall
Headteacher
Blackpool St John's Church of England Primary School
Church Street
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Dear Mrs Hall

Short inspection of Blackpool St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2015, 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 July 2012.

Since the previous inspection five teachers have joined the school, including three newly qualified teachers.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You provide insightful leadership and delegate leadership responsibilities very effectively to make the best use of everyone's expertise. Staff are able to take initiative and lead improvement, which they do successfully. Governors show ambition for the pupils and have a good understanding of the school's performance. You ensure that leaders and staff can learn from best practice through partnership work with schools locally and across the country. Professional development is very well planned to ensure the school's priorities for development are tackled successfully and teachers' knowledge and skills continue to grow.

Pupils thrive in the happy, vibrant school you have created. Staff work together effectively to provide a nurturing environment for pupils, while maintaining high expectations for their academic achievement and raising their aspirations. Pupils grow in confidence and their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics continues to rise. The exciting curriculum enables pupils to increase their knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects and develop personal skills that enable them to continue to succeed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well. Teachers promote values such as perseverance,

kindness, humility, respect and trust through teaching and by example. Pupils' understanding of such values prepares them well for life in modern Britain. The school provides a well-ordered and stimulating environment that celebrates pupils' achievements.

The previous inspection identified a few areas for the school to work on in order to raise pupils' achievement in writing. Since that inspection, teachers have introduced a different approach to providing oral and written feedback, which is helping pupils to improve their written work successfully. Pupils have clear guidelines about the features of a successful piece of writing and receive helpful advice from teachers. Pupils make good progress in writing, from low starting points, to achieve standards that are in line with age-related expectations by the time they leave Year 6. Pupils make even better progress in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling, to attain standards that are often above those expected of pupils their age by the time they leave Year 6.

The vast majority of parents who made their views known to me were very happy with the school. Comments such as: 'the school has made my child find a love of learning and each day [my child] can't wait to get to school'; 'the school has a welcoming, relaxed and fun atmosphere'; 'children settle well and make really good progress' were typical. Pupils who spoke with me were also extremely happy at school. They said, for example, 'it's a friendly school' and 'teachers help you if you get stuck with your work'. A staff survey completed in school was similarly extremely positive. This inspection confirms the views of parents, pupils and staff.

Your current priorities for development are based on a thorough and incisive evaluation of the school's performance. The positive impact of improvement planning can be seen clearly in the improving outcomes for pupils, including their academic achievement, personal development and attendance at school. Leaders, staff and governors work together effectively. High levels of commitment, ambition for pupils and effective development planning provide strong capacity for further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Record-keeping is exemplary; the records of support, liaison with outside agencies, logs of incidents and analysis of the impact of actions taken are extremely detailed. Leaders are meticulous in ensuring appropriate checks are carried out on all people who have contact with children in school. They make sure staff are aware of the latest guidance and receive relevant training to ensure the continuing safety of children. Every effort is made to ensure pupils attend regularly and support families who need extra help.

Pupils' good attendance reflects their enjoyment of school and the fact that they feel safe and secure. As one child put it, 'we can always go to teachers if we feel upset

or worried about anything'. Bullying was not mentioned as a concern by any of the pupils, staff or parents. Pupils are confident that teachers will take concerns seriously. Parents' views are equally positive, stating for example, 'children receive excellent care and support so they are safe and feel confident'. Parents are particularly pleased with the support for children's behavioural, medical or special educational needs.

Inspection findings

- Leaders' and governors' evaluation of strengths and areas for further development is clear and incisive and based on a wide range of evidence. It supports good-quality planning for improvement.
- Leaders at all levels check teaching and learning and lead improvement in their area of responsibility effectively.
- Professional development is a particular strength. The school's participation in a number of networks ensures that staff can share their expertise more widely and learn from other professionals. For example, the Challenge Partners Network enables leaders to learn from good practice in schools across the country. The school also benefits from joint training and the sharing of best practice through the Blackpool Primary Partnership and a network of Lancashire schools.
- You have ensured that leaders and staff learn from robust challenge and effective support by buying in advisory services from Lancashire local authority.
- Staff are enthusiastic, show pride in their work and have high aspirations for the pupils. They are forward-looking, keep up to date with changes in education and are keen to learn from proven good practice. You are developing effective approaches to assess pupils' learning against the age-related expectations of the National Curriculum.
- Governors have a good understanding of the performance of the school because they are kept well informed with reports from leaders, look at information about pupils' progress carefully and ask challenging questions. They take advantage of support from the Lancashire school adviser to develop their skills.
- A relatively high proportion of children start school in the early years with limited knowledge and skills, especially in language and literacy. From these starting points, pupils catch up well as they progress through the school. By the time they get to Year 6, most pupils are working at or above standards expected for their age.
- Pupils' progress in writing is quickening but still lags behind progress in reading and mathematics. The development of pupils' vocabulary, spelling and their use of more sophisticated grammar, remain areas for further development as pupils get older. The extension of pupils' language, development of handwriting skills and understanding about the sounds that letters make (phonics) are the main priorities for improvement in the early years and at Key Stage 1.
- Strong subject knowledge and effective teaching in mathematics and reading help pupils to achieve well in these subjects. Pupils develop their understanding

of mathematical language and develop good reasoning skills. They enjoy reading a range of interesting texts.

- Disadvantaged pupils do just as well as others in the school. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and often make rapid progress. Teachers know the pupils well and adapt teaching to meet their needs.
- In the early years and at Key Stage 1, teachers make sure that pupils' learning is secure, help children to grow in confidence and promote good attitudes to learning. These attributes provide strong foundations on which to build, so pupils are able to make more rapid progress in Years 3 to 6.
- Pupils develop their knowledge and skills in a range of subjects through interesting topic work and lessons that capture their imagination. Their creative abilities are nurtured especially well.
- Pupils work enthusiastically and persevere with challenging tasks during lessons. They behave sensibly and considerately as they move around school.
- In Key Stage 1 pupils learned effectively in small groups about the sounds that letters make. The vast majority of pupils who did not achieve well in the Year 1 phonics check last year have made up lost ground and are now achieving expected standards.
- Children in the early years benefit from an exciting and stimulating learning environment both indoors and outdoors. They are able to explore, discover, investigate and exercise in an environment that has been created with great vision. The teacher is a leading foundation stage teacher for Lancashire and the provision is often visited by other providers.
- The challenge to enable children to make more rapid progress with their language and literacy skills in the early years remains, and is a priority in the school's improvement planning. Care is being taken to make sure boys are engaged and making good progress, as gaps between boys' and girls' achievement have been wide in the past. During my visit to the early years' class, all children were enthusiastically engaged in activities to develop their writing skills and fine motor skills. Adults supported their language development effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors have identified the most important priorities for improvement in school development plans. These include the drive to:

- quicken children's language and literacy development in the early years
- improve handwriting and phonics skills in Key Stage 1
- broaden pupils' vocabulary from the early stages and introduce more sophisticated use of language and grammatical structures as pupils progress through school
- ensure that gaps between girls' and boys' achievement continue to close in the early years.

Your improvement plans cover all of the above points and more. There were no further areas for improvement identified during this visit.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, two governors and the school adviser from Lancashire local authority. I visited classrooms to observe learning and look at pupils' work. I spoke with pupils during lessons, around the school and in a meeting. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and at your self-evaluation and action planning. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, training, safeguarding checks and record-keeping. I spoke with several parents at the start of the day, took account of three 'freetext' comments on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, and 60 responses to the school's own parent survey. I took account of 11 staff questionnaires completed in school recently.