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Mr J Blakely  
Headteacher  
Garstang St Thomas' Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mr Blakely

### **Short inspection of Garstang St Thomas' Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 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 May 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your arrival in January 2018, you spared no time in getting to know your new school by engaging with pupils, parents and staff. As a result, you have an accurate and honest view of the school's strengths and priorities. You work closely with leaders to ensure that pupils' welfare is at the heart of all decisions that you make. Additionally, you make sure that pupils engage in a wide range of learning opportunities. Your deputy headteacher supports you effectively in raising standards. This has raised aspirations and instilled a new sense of purpose by enabling pupils to achieve all they are capable of while maintaining the ethos of the school.

Governors are involved in school life and in the community. As a result, they are aware of the positive impact that leaders' actions are having on school improvement. They hold you to account and ensure that leaders and teachers continue to deliver good-quality education to pupils. All staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school and felt that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement, such as in developing questioning skills.

Parents and carers who spoke with me during the inspection, and those who responded online, were extremely positive about the recent changes to the school's provision. One comment summed up the many positive ones: 'The new headteacher is forward looking, eager to ensure that each pupil is stretched to reach their maximum potential. It's a fun, caring environment; a real family atmosphere. The children always come first.'

Pupils like attending school. They appreciate the range of opportunities and events. Pupils especially enjoy the emphasis on sport and physical education before, during and after school. However, pupils also told me that they would welcome the opportunity to be more creative in their writing across other subjects.

At the last inspection leaders were asked to refine the school's tracking and assessment systems to analyse the performance of all groups more effectively. Staff now have access to the most recent pupil assessment information to track groups of pupils carefully and inform their planning. Through pupil-progress meetings with teachers, you are increasing teachers' focus on groups of pupils.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that all pupils receive clear advice about how to improve their work. Pupils receive sufficient guidance in all areas of the curriculum to help them make progress. Teachers quickly intervene when necessary to move pupils' learning forward.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. Leaders' own evaluation accurately highlights that further work is required to ensure that the most-able pupils achieve the highest standards in all subjects. Additionally, leaders recognise that the opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English are not consistent across key stage 2.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a high profile. Staff, pupils and their parents report that pupils feel safe and well looked after at St Thomas. All records and systems are fit for purpose. Leaders make sure that safeguarding is a priority in the staff recruitment and induction processes.

Pupils feel well cared for and told me they know who to go to should they have any concerns. They trust adults to resolve any issues that may arise. As a result of the school's caring approach and ethos, pupils feel confident and assured. Pupils report that they know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

All parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, confirmed that their children are happy and feel safe at school. There are good relationships between pupils that support learning and promote their personal development. This contributes to the good behaviour and welcoming atmosphere evident throughout the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes across key stage 1. You have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve in key stage 1. This happens through your regular visits to classrooms and meetings with staff to discuss pupils' progress. You have also ensured that teachers have developed a strong subject knowledge. This is especially evident in mathematics. Teachers support pupils through good-quality questioning that clarifies any misconceptions and encourages them to

move quickly onto new and more challenging activities. Teachers know their pupils' starting points and they plan tasks that build upon prior learning. As a result, pupils' progress is good across key stage 1.

- In key stage 1, teachers have high expectations of the vocabulary and language features that pupils will use in their writing. Pupils' books show that there are opportunities for them to write at length and to apply their knowledge and writing skills in a range of contexts across a variety of curriculum areas. This encourages pupils to write interesting pieces. The consistent teaching of phonics is also having an impact on progress in key stage 1. A greater focus on spelling, handwriting and extended writing is beginning to have a positive effect on the progress of current pupils. This was evident in the Year 2 work on 'brushing crocodiles' teeth'. However, these recent changes have not yet had an impact on significantly increasing the percentage of pupils attaining higher standards in both reading and writing, particularly at key stage 2.
- The next area we looked at was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at St Thomas' is small compared to the national average. Leaders are working hard to accelerate the progress made by disadvantaged pupils currently at the school, and a good range of social, emotional and academic support is in place. You and your staff identify and remove barriers to learning for these pupils. Staff work with pupils in small groups or individually to develop their social and emotional skills. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning are improving as activities match the needs of these pupils accurately. Work in pupils' books and your most recent performance information show that, across the curriculum, the progress these pupils make is strong.
- A third line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the progress of the middle-ability and most-able pupils. In tackling this issue, you have been successful in enabling pupils to be more aspirational. You have embedded systems and procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning. You hold staff to account, using precise targets linked to accelerating pupils' progress, especially for the most able pupils. You hold regular meetings to focus on pupils' progress. This gives teachers and other staff a greater awareness of any gaps in pupils' learning. This is allowing them to make adaptations to planning to meet more closely the individual needs of these pupils. In addition, pupils are taking more responsibility for their own learning. Questions asked in class are challenging for all pupils and they know how to improve their work. Overall, middle- and most-able pupils' progress is strong across a range of subjects. However, the improvements are not yet fully embedded.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is also strong. Your new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is very effective. Leaders ensure that there is a range of bespoke support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Staff expectations for these pupils are high. You deploy staff to give pupils extra help in developing their skills in English and mathematics. You work effectively with a range of outside agencies to support pupils' needs. Relationships and communication with parents are good. Parents appreciate the quality of support on offer, with comments such as 'The SENCo really cares and is very thorough in planning for and including my child in all aspects of school life, she is very approachable too.' As a result of this provision, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress from their starting points in a range of subjects. Your most recent assessment information and pupils' work in books confirms this to be the case.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to learning are embedded, so that the most-able pupils attain the higher standards and achieve all that they are capable of at the end of each key stage
- pupils in key stage 2 have more opportunities in writing to deepen and extend their vocabulary, stamina and ideas in a range of subjects across the curriculum.

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

Simon Hunter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you and I also spoke with senior staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. Alongside you and your deputy headteacher, I looked at learning in pupils' books. I also spoke to the local authority adviser.

I reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and the school development plan. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also considered 10 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 13 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.

I visited classes, together with you, to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.