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Mr Paul Anderson
Headteacher
Hurst Knoll St James' Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of Hurst Knoll St James' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 2017, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and your deputy are a very strong and capable team. You are well supported by a committed and highly effective governing body which does not hold back on asking difficult and probing questions of school leaders. Under your leadership the school has improved greatly since the last inspection because of your clear vision and dynamic leadership. Your ambition for pupils' academic achievement, as well as their social and personal development, is shared by all staff and pupils. You have made some tough decisions since your appointment as headteacher and have not held back in tackling underperformance. You have raised expectations in your school and all are working hard to meet these expectations.

I was particularly struck by the passion your pupils showed when talking about their school and their well-founded trust in you to keep them safe. This means that instances of bullying or disruptive behaviour are extremely rare. Pupils take great pride in their school and their school community. They behave well during work and play, taking care of each other and of their school. They take enormous pride in their work and speak confidently and articulately across a range of topics.

The pupils I talked to struggled to identify how the school could be improved. They spoke with great enthusiasm about how much they loved coming to school. They take immense pride in their leadership roles. They have a strong sense of democracy and the rule of law which is something they have learned from their responsibilities in their leadership roles. This is indicative of the commitment that you and your staff

have to developing the pupils into young people who have a strong sense of moral purpose. These children are very comfortable with the concept of tolerance and they celebrate difference. The work you have done to promote equality of opportunity for all is commendable. This is a key part of the core values and Christian ethos you promote in your school. One parent commented that, 'The school has a family feel to it.'

Writing was an area of improvement at the last inspection. You put in place a strategy to improve the quality of teachers' knowledge about teaching writing. As a consequence, teachers are better placed to teach writing to a high standard. Leaders have developed writing targets for pupils to work towards, which are now much sharper. Staff understand the expectations around the teaching of writing. Pupils are much clearer on how they can improve the quality of their writing and their next steps for improvement. Progress in writing has improved significantly in all classes. Outcomes in writing are now at least as good as in other schools nationally.

Another aspect to improve was to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching. There has been significant staff turnover in senior leadership and teachers in both key stages since the last inspection. Due to good leadership and management by you and your team, the impact of the change in teachers has resulted in minimal disruption to pupils. You provide a wide range of professional development for teachers and teaching assistants so that the quality of provision continues to improve.

The improved quality of teaching has led to better outcomes for children across the school. Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, now make good progress overall. The provision in the early years is a strength. The children thrive in a rich environment with clear systems and routines. The resources both inside the classroom and outdoors are developing children's learning successfully. This is all led by your highly capable early years team.

You have, however, recognised in your self-evaluation that there is some variability in the progress pupils make in their reading. In 2016, some disadvantaged children did not do as well as other pupils nationally. The school's own tracking shows differences in outcomes for reading. Key stage 1 reading was below national average, with few children reaching greater depth.

With the support of your leaders, you introduced a programme to improve pupils' reading and develop their understanding of a range of texts. This was started in the autumn of 2016 and reviewed in the spring to ensure maximum impact on raising standards. These actions include your highly effective work with parents to help them support their children's reading. Your mid-day supervisors are also playing a key role in your strategy to improve reading when they listen to children read before and after dinner time. You have worked effectively to improve the quality of phonics teaching in Year 1 so all groups of pupils achieve the level expected for their age.

I saw the early shoots of improvement. During the learning walk I saw confident readers; I listened to children read and they talked with enthusiasm and vigour about their reading. Pupils' reading is starting to improve.

Excellent support for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is ensuring their good progress across the school. Your inclusion team is highly capable and works hard to support the needs of all pupils across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are of a high quality. These arrangements are understood by all staff, governors and pupils. Staff new to the school have a highly effective induction which ensures that they fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Newly qualified teachers were very positive about the induction and support they got from the school.

Staff and governors receive regular, appropriate, up-to-date training. This includes training related to the 'Prevent' duty and e-safety. Pupils knew about how to keep safe online and in a range of different situations. This is because you and your team have created a strong culture of safeguarding. This culture is understood and shared by pupils, parents, governors and staff.

The safeguarding lead in the school works hard to ensure that pupils' needs are met in a timely way. There are effective relationships with a wide range of agencies to give pupils the support they need. You and your team ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. You are highly vigilant in relation to the care and support of vulnerable pupils. This means staff are well equipped to spot, and report, any signs of potential harm to the pupils in their care.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these revealed that you have tackled the areas of improvement from the last inspection. These were to improve the quality of writing and to ensure that all teaching was at least consistently good. You and your colleagues have tackled the area of writing successfully with outcomes in writing at least as good as those of other pupils nationally. Writing is now a strength. Teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection with strengths in the early years and upper key stage 2.
- The next line of enquiry looked at how your leadership team and governors ensure that the most able pupils are challenged. Your honest and accurate self-evaluation correctly identifies this as an area for improvement. The most able pupils make the slowest progress in key stage 1, with very few pupils exceeding national expectations in reading and mathematics. Leaders are addressing this issue and teachers now have higher expectations of the most able pupils. They are also starting to set them more challenging work.
- You provided evidence of a wide curriculum plan in response to another key line of enquiry. This plan has a clear set of expectations and activities across the

curriculum. Teaching and pupils' outcomes are good in English and mathematics. However, the curriculum does not yet ensure that activities in history, geography and science reflect the same high quality of work that pupils produce in English and mathematics.

- The spending of the pupil premium funding was followed up during the inspection. This funding helps pupils make at least expected progress across the school. There now needs to be improved targeting of the fund and support. This is to enable a higher proportion of middle-ability disadvantaged pupils attain above the standard expected for their age.
- We agreed when reviewing the next focus for the inspection that you and your team have very effectively reduced exclusions and increased attendance. Exclusions are now rare. Fixed-term exclusions have been reduced from 8.6% in 2014/2015 to just 0.94% currently. Attendance is now around the national average. The work of the inclusion team has been very effective in reducing exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour. Your strong leadership has established high-quality pastoral care with good systems for pre-empting exclusions. Family support work has developed a good partnership between school and home.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying and appreciate that if it occurs it is dealt with effectively. Pupils speak with passion and positivity of the support they receive from you and other leaders. Almost all staff, parents and pupils who shared their views agree that pupils are safe and free from bullying. This is because you have created a welcoming, supportive and positive ethos in the school. Pupils speak positively about the reflection system in school and restorative justice. This has been a key factor in establishing the strong and harmonious relationships across the school. The school has developed well a values-led behaviour policy in line with its strong Christian ethos.
- Governors are a strength of the school. They are supportive and proud of all that has been achieved. You have established an open relationship between governors and leaders. As a result, governors support and challenge you and your leadership team in equal measure. Governors are highly capable and knowledgeable. Those new to the governing body are proud to be involved in an atmosphere where challenge is welcomed and where the governing board is making real decisions. You have created a strong team of leaders and governors to move the school forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching is consistently good or better
- children in key stage 1 reach the highest possible levels of achievement, in particular the most able pupils in mathematics and reading
- pupils' work in history, geography, and science better reflects pupils' standards in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Tonge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders in the school to discuss the impact of actions you are taking to raise standards in the school. I spent time in the playground where I spoke to four parents. You and the deputy headteacher accompanied me on visits to all classes, where we observed teaching and learning, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I met three current governors and the previous chair of the governing body. I made a phone call to your school improvement partner. I spoke to a range of pupils about their views on school. I heard children read. I spoke to newly appointed staff and support staff. I spoke with those responsible for safeguarding and inclusion. I considered the nine responses to Ofsted's online parent survey. I also considered the 55 responses to the online pupil survey and 13 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. I considered your school's website, your self-evaluation document, your school improvement plan and information about the achievement of pupils in school. I reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements and its process for keep children safe in education.