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Mrs Katie Walsh
Headteacher
Silverdale St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Walsh

Short inspection of Silverdale St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. School leaders have successfully navigated a course through a period of some turbulence, and are making sure that the school is now moving forwards at a good pace. Leaders, staff and governors have a clear shared ambition for the school, and staff speak very highly of the sense of teamwork and togetherness that the new leadership team has created. The large majority of parents are highly supportive of the school, particularly praising its strong links with the church and village and the 'caring and friendly environment'.

Pupils are fine ambassadors for their school. They are well mannered, friendly and welcoming to visitors. Pupils' behaviour around school and on the playground is of a high standard, and pupils also display positive attitudes to learning in class. They listen closely to their teachers and respond quickly to instructions. Pupils are articulate, and discuss their work and explain their views and ideas clearly and confidently. Pupils are also impressively reflective and thoughtful, for example when explaining how they might use the areas for prayer and reflection that have been set up around the school. Rates of attendance are above average and few pupils are regularly absent from school.

The school provides pupils with a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils' work shows that they are developing a good range of subject-specific skills, such as

being able to compare and contrast historical artefacts, use maps accurately and carry out their own research and investigations. The school makes good use too of its local environment, regularly running outdoor learning sessions in the nearby woodland and visiting places of interest, such as Borwick Hall. The curriculum is further enriched by a varied programme of extra-curricular clubs, which include sports, arts and music activities.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Assessment information is now used in a more focused way, identifying gaps in pupils' learning and then making sure that extra support is put in place to help pupils catch-up quickly. Pupils' written work shows that teachers are encouraging them to spend more time editing their work, and as a result many pupils are using more adventurous vocabulary and experimenting with sentence structure. The outdoor learning environment in the early years has been developed and children are now able to access more activities outside, although you realise that more could be done and have plans for further developments that will make better use of the school's attractive grounds.

Leaders, including governors, know the school very well and recognise where further improvements could be made. The school development plan developed by leaders and governors highlights well-chosen areas for improvement. In it you have identified aspects of pupils' outcomes that could be strengthened. One such area is the performance of the most able pupils across the school, and there are promising signs that your actions are having a positive impact on most-able pupils' writing. You are also aware that outcomes in phonics and spelling have been inconsistent.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff and governors receive regular training covering various aspects of safeguarding. As a result, they have a secure understanding of the procedures to follow if they are worried about a pupil's welfare. Leaders also ensure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that their teachers will look after them. They have a good understanding of important aspects of safety, such as using the internet safely. Pupils also understand that many different types of bullying exist, such as racism and cyberbullying, but say that instances of bullying in their school are exceedingly rare. Parents share their children's confidence and all who responded to the 'Parent View' survey said that their children felt safe in school.

Inspection findings

- The inspection considered a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which was to see how effectively phonics and spelling are taught across the school. In

2016 and 2017, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check and key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test have been at or below national average and so have been out of step with most other aspects of the school's performance.

- The school's tracking shows that current pupils make good progress in developing their phonic skills and knowledge. Children in Reception class were blending simple words accurately and confidently while pupils in Year 2 showed that they could use their knowledge of phonics to help them to read unfamiliar words. In both key stage 2 classes, spelling is now taught in a highly focused manner, and staff display strong subject knowledge. However, it is clear that pupils have some catching up to do, as their knowledge of common spelling rules and patterns is not as strong as it should be.
- In their written work, pupils use an impressively broad range of vocabulary and use techniques, such as varying sentence lengths, with some skill. However, errors in spelling and punctuation and inconsistencies in handwriting detract from the overall effect of their writing. Teachers do not currently have high enough expectations of pupils' basic spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills and so do not consistently challenge careless errors.
- The second area of focus for the inspection was on the progress that most-able pupils in particular make in mathematics in key stage 2. Attainment and progress dipped in the key stage 2 assessments in 2017, and the proportion of pupils achieving the higher level dropped to below national average. Leaders have responded decisively, reviewing and refining strategies for teaching mathematics to ensure that the demands of the revised curriculum are being met. It is clear too that unavoidable inconsistencies in teaching have also had an impact on pupils' progress.
- You have successfully brought stability to the staffing situation in key stage 2, and pupils' work confirms that progress this year in mathematics is accelerating. Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to use practical materials to consolidate their skills and to then solve mathematical problems in order to practise and build their understanding. However, teachers are too often asking pupils to complete large numbers of similar examples before moving on to more challenging work, and this stops them from making the full amount of progress that they are capable of in mathematics.
- The final key line of enquiry focused on the quality of the school's curriculum, and particularly how well the school catered for pupils in the mixed-age classes. Evidence from the visits I made to classes, from pupils' work and the school's tracking information confirmed that teachers are diligent in matching work to the needs of pupils of different ages in their classes. In this they are well supported by a very capable group of teaching assistants. Pupils confirmed that they enjoyed a wide range of different subjects, and were particularly enthusiastic about the many practical activities in school, such as working with an artist and learning salsa dancing. Leaders have thus successfully ensured that the school's curriculum is engaging and effective.
- School leaders and governors provide the school with positive and well-focused leadership. They have not shied away from making difficult decisions, and have been successful in ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning and

outcomes for pupils are good. Leaders and governors have continued to develop the school's role within the community and are ambitious for the school's future success. Capacity for further improvement is good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff have consistently high expectations of the accuracy of pupils' spelling and punctuation and the quality of their handwriting
- in mathematics, particularly within key stage 2, teachers move most-able pupils on to new challenges quickly enough so that they reach their full potential.

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

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, seven members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the Diocese and took into account an email received from another governor. I met a group of teaching and support staff. I considered 26 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text comments. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.