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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Kate Garner
Acting Headteacher
St John with St Michael Church of England Primary School, Shawforth
Moss Side Street
Shawforth
Rochdale
Lancashire
OL12 8EP

Dear Mrs Garner

Short inspection of St John with St Michael Church of England Primary School, Shawforth

Following my visit on 22 March 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been many staff changes since the last inspection, including your appointment as acting headteacher in January 2017. The acting deputy headteacher is also new to her post. You and your team have quickly adjusted to these changes. Through your strong leadership, you provide clear, decisive and rigorous leadership that puts pupils at the heart of all you do. You are quick to point out that this is made possible because of the support and commitment of your staff and governors. The school community work together for the benefit of pupils. The pupils know this and they are extremely proud of their school. They told me, 'The best thing about our school is everyone in it. Everyone looks out for each other. It's a real community feel.'

In your role as acting headteacher, you have quickly established a precise overview of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You have lost no time in taking steps to move the school forward. For example, you quickly analysed current assessment information to ensure that teaching and interventions continued to maximise pupil progress.

The governing body has fully supported you in your role and is a strength. It helps you to drive the strategic direction of the school as well as offering day-to-day practical support. Governors go above and beyond their formal role in their support.

They spoke with great pride about their community-oriented school. Governors offer you appropriate support and challenge, ensuring that they constantly ask, 'How will it make a positive difference to pupils?'

Pupils attain standards that are in line with national averages across all key stages apart from writing at key stage 1. Although the small number in each cohort distorts the results of national assessments, the school has given most attention to improving writing in key stage 1. You have rightly identified this as an area that you are currently working to improve.

The proportion of pupils working at the greater depth is not high. Teachers have begun to tackle this work by providing more challenge for pupils in reading and writing. You have identified this and have plans to improve this area. However, there is still some way to go, particularly in mathematics.

Leaders have tackled the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. We looked together at pupils' work and you explained how pupils are developing their independence. I also saw how pupils had positive attitudes to their learning and were not afraid to 'have a go' when they found things difficult in their lessons.

Parents, pupils and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Pupils shared with me that they are extremely happy and I observed how confident and well-mannered they are. We both agreed that pupils were highly engaged in their learning throughout the school and showed positive learning behaviours. Parents' comments supported this, saying that there is a 'friendly and supportive atmosphere' and that teachers instil 'hopes and aspirations for students, encouraging them to strive for higher achievement'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are highly vigilant. You have continued to develop the effective safeguarding culture and have ensured that there are clear, robust checks in place to keep pupils safe. Procedures are known by all staff because of your regular briefings and updates. Recruitment checks completed on staff are thorough.

Pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including when they work online. Pupils spoke of leading the e-safety assembly and gave many examples of how the curriculum teaches them to act safely. Parents and pupils are aware of the importance of attending school and they feel safe and secure because of the approachability of staff.

Inspection findings

- We agreed at the start of the inspection some key lines of enquiry. The first key line of enquiry was concerned with how well the needs of the most able pupils are met in key stage 2. Pupils' attainment in key stage 2 is in line with the national average across all subjects. However, the progress of most-able pupils is

not fast in writing and mathematics. Together, we looked at the progress of most-able pupils in key stage 2 and agreed that these pupils make progress in writing. However, there are still some inconsistencies of progress in mathematics. Teachers track and analyse the progress of the most able pupils and make good use of this information in their writing. However, this is not always the case in mathematics. For example, pupils are sometimes asked to complete tasks that are too easy. Pupils' writing books are well presented and pupils have a wide range of opportunities to write across the curriculum. Most pupils write consistently to a high standard in both their literacy books and in their topic books. There is evidence of challenge through probing questions and high expectations set by teachers in writing. We spoke about the need to embed this further in mathematics.

- The next focus was on writing and phonics in key stage 1. Pupils in key stage 1 attain well in reading and mathematics. However, in 2016, the numbers of pupils reaching the expected standards in writing and phonics in Year 2 dipped. You offered clear reasons for this and provided good evidence in assessment information and pupils' books to show that pupils are making good progress in writing. Leaders have taken decisive steps to improve writing in the key stage. For example, action was taken to divide the year into two smaller classes for literacy and numeracy so that pupils receive more support. Teachers reinforce basic skills in writing and ensure that learning is well structured. Teachers explain new learning clearly and share their expectations for learning with pupils.
- You provided evidence of your plans to develop the teaching of phonics in response to another key line of enquiry. Teachers talk confidently about the progress of pupils. You have established routines and teachers follow these closely. We agreed that sometimes learning time was lost as pupils were not challenged enough and in some groups teaching was inconsistent. You have taken some steps to address this and have further training planned for staff.
- We agreed to focus on the early years as there were some variances between some areas of learning, particularly in writing and mathematics in the early years 2016 published data. Leaders in the early years know the children well and the provision is resourced effectively. Parents and staff work closely together to support children in their next steps. When we visited the early years classrooms, we noted that children showed good levels of concentration and enjoyment and were actively making cards. They enjoyed playing in role. We looked in children's books carefully and agreed that at times, opportunities for children to develop writing and mathematics skills were not well developed and recording was inconsistent. You have identified this in your improvement plans along with seeking appropriate support from the local authority.
- The focus on attendance was resolved quickly. You have put in place clear robust systems for monitoring and tracking pupils who are persistently absent. You established a range of strategies for supporting pupils to improve their attendance. As a result, absence rates are reducing across the school.
- Prior to the inspection there were aspects of the website that did not meet requirements. Upon my arrival at the school, you provided me with evidence that governors had reviewed and updated all the necessary policies and that

governors reviewed the website regularly. There have been issues beyond your control in ensuring that the website was updated. My meeting with governors and scrutiny of the documentation made very clear that governors fulfil their responsibilities with care and attention.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching of mathematics at key stage 2 provides the most able pupils with greater challenge to enable them to achieve at greater depth
- leaders embed plans to improve the consistency of teaching and levels of challenge in phonics
- the plan for developing writing and mathematics in the early years is fully implemented and checked for impact.

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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Blackwell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher and four members of the governing body and I spoke to a representative from the local authority. With you, I conducted a learning walk and visited all classes and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see their work. I met with a group of pupils during the day, spoke with a number of parents at the school gates and took account of seven free-text comments. I scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.