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Bolton by Bowland Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Stansfield

Short inspection of Bolton by Bowland Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2016, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has continued to improve since the last inspection because of your focus on consistently good-quality teaching and learning. Your quietly determined leadership and passion for providing pupils with a memorable educational experience are highly effective. You, and all staff, have created a strong sense of care and nurture for the whole school community. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of Bolton by Bowland and all agree that the school is well led and they are treated fairly and with respect. You have led staff in a shared commitment and enthusiasm to improve the school. The high expectations you have set ensure that there is a strong focus on achieving the very best for your pupils.

The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to me, or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that the school is supportive and you and your staff are welcoming and approachable. A large number of parents commented on the school being 'caring and nurturing'. Comments from parents such as 'Our children flourish because teachers go the extra mile for them', 'fantastic school' and the 'communication is excellent between parents and teachers' are typical. This is a happy and purposeful school where pupils, parents and staff have a strong sense of being part of a school 'family'.

The very small number of pupils in each year group means that attainment at the end of each key stage can vary greatly from year to year.

In 2016, all children reached a good level of development at the end of Reception and the percentage of pupils that met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check was above pupils of a similar age nationally. Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stages 1 and 2 were comparable to or above the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

At the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth was higher than pupils of a similar age nationally in reading and mathematics. At the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in reading was also above pupils nationally. However, you are mindful that, for pupils with the potential to achieve at higher standards, the picture is mixed and could be further improved. This is done particularly through ensuring pupils are challenged and extended in all lessons to think more deeply about their work. The plans you have put in place are already leading to improvement in this area and pupils are now on track to achieve at a more challenging level.

Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported by staff and they make good and better progress through school.

Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has developed considerably. You have responded well to the recent national changes and are now looking to add your own innovations to create a curriculum that is distinctive to the school and further 'hooks' pupils into their learning.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to ensure that the quality of teaching was consistently good or better by increasing the pace in some lessons, and providing challenging opportunities in mathematics for pupils to use and apply their problem-solving skills.

Leaders have addressed all of these aspects effectively and have ensured that the following improvements have taken place:

- There is a good pace established in lessons. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to learn new skills and suitable time to practise them. Lessons are interesting and pupils are eager to join in. Pupils are expected to work productively and with concentration. As a result, the large quantity of work in pupils' books, so early in the school year, indicates that no time is wasted.
- Teachers' secure subject knowledge and the quality of teaching have ensured that pupils have a good range of mathematical skills. As a result, pupils are increasingly confident in applying their learning to solving problems. Pupils are able to explain why they have chosen particular methods and say they really enjoy their mathematics lessons because of the challenges they are given.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are well-maintained systems in place in all areas of safeguarding and staff understand them. Safeguarding arrangements are regularly reviewed to meet statutory requirements. Frequent and appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to date, including that related to the 'Prevent' duty. You and your team ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. Your vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a high standard. Leaders have effective relationships with other agencies, and are persistent in situations where vulnerable pupils need extra support or advocacy.

Pupils were unanimous in saying they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They are confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils develop effective personal skills within a nurturing environment. Pupils talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. The vast majority of parents feel that you and the staff keep their children safe and well looked after. As a result, pupils are very happy and keen to come to school.

Inspection findings

- Your school's self-evaluation and school development plans are good. They are accurate, reflective and used effectively to ensure that everyone in school is clear about the direction they are heading. You and your leadership team have a good capacity for further improvement.
- Your drive for improvement has been focused effectively on establishing high expectations and consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. You know each teacher's strengths and areas for development very well.
- Staff have benefited from a range of training. Being a small school in an isolated area has not held you back from encouraging your staff to work with other schools and, as the headteacher of two schools, you have also taken up opportunities to share practice and skills between them. I agree with you that it would be useful for you and your team to continue to look at outstanding practice in teaching and learning. This will support your plans for the next stage of your school's improvement journey.
- Governors are effective and play an informed role in evaluating the school's effectiveness. Governors have used their own experiences well to play an active role in the life of the school. I was particularly impressed with the way they are always seeking to improve their knowledge and expertise. They share your passion for providing the best for pupils and are very supportive, but are also able to challenge where needed.
- The information you gather about pupils' progress is appropriate. You have taken on the local authority system but are now changing and adapting it to a way of collecting assessment information that suits you and your staff. However, leaders, teachers and governors use the system you have effectively to identify which pupils or groups are making progress and which ones need some additional support or challenge. It has also been effective in encouraging teachers in lessons to focus on the skills and attributes that pupils have and need to gain.

- Your regular checks and meetings ensure that all staff feel responsible for every pupil's learning and also give them an opportunity to reflect on how they could further adapt their teaching to meet their pupils' needs. Parents particularly mentioned to me how well you meet their child's needs and, if required, are quick to support them to catch up with their learning.
- Curriculum leaders are keen to make an important contribution to driving further improvements. They talk with enthusiasm and knowledge about their curriculum areas, particularly when it involves developing aspects of the curriculum in more depth and making it even more lively and interesting for pupils.
- You have correctly identified the need to improve further the achievement of pupils to reach higher standards, through ensuring pupils are challenged to think more deeply about their work and practise their reasoning skills. To this end, you have taken decisive action, including refining your English and mathematics curriculum. This is already having an impact and evidence suggests pupils are on track to make good and better progress.
- Attendance is above the national average. You have good-quality systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality and you use them effectively. There is a range of rewards for good attendance. There is no persistent absence because of your high expectations and the importance you place on pupils being in school. Where families are struggling, you are firm but supportive and exercise appropriate sensitivity on an individual family basis. As a result, you have had great success in improving the attendance of those that have needed encouragement.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are strong in school. Conduct around the school building and in class is of a very high standard. Pupils are polite, kind and thoughtful to each other. Pupils say they are 'one big family' and that the 'older ones always look after the young ones'. One pupil commented that everyone is welcome and 'we treat everyone the same'. This is typical of the consideration that pupils have for each other.
- A real strength of the school is how well you communicate with parents. All of the parents I spoke to during the inspection commented on how much they appreciated you making sure that they know how their child is doing and how they can help them further. Starting the school day with time for parents and pupils to share work in books is valued by both. It is also an excellent way of ensuring that pupils have an opportunity to respond to any comments teachers have made about their work and any next steps or corrections they need to make.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to provide engaging and motivating activities in class. As a result, pupils have a very good attitude to learning. There is a consistent focus throughout the school on a high standard of presentation and on ensuring that the marking policy is followed.
- Pupils enjoy problem-solving in mathematics and they apply their mathematical skills well. Pupils are encouraged to explain and talk about the skills they use. This they do with enthusiasm and confidence. Work in pupils' mathematics and writing books indicates good progress over time. However, some pupils would benefit from even more opportunities to be extended in English and mathematics.

- The importance of reading and writing is prominent throughout the school. Pupils read well and those that struggle have a good range of strategies to help them. You are mindful of increasing the range of interesting reading books for pupils. One of a number of ways the love of reading has been fostered has been through the introduction of a 'reading challenge'. Pupils are encouraged to read 10 books, mark these off on a bookmark and, when they have reached their target, they receive a reading prize.
- Opportunities to write across the curriculum are clearly evident, as are occasions to write for different purposes to a high standard. For example in Year 5/6, pupils were excited and highly motivated by writing a persuasive letter to encourage Miss Honey, from the book 'Matilda' (by Roald Dahl), to let them eat chocolate in class. One pupil reflected that it would be a much harder job to persuade the 'mean Miss Trunchbull'.
- Most children start early years with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. There is a good quality of provision and teaching offered to this mixed group of Nursery and Reception children. As a result, children make good progress by the time they leave. There is a wide range of stimulating, good-quality learning experiences available to children and they visibly enjoy engaging in them. As a result, children are happy and keen to learn.
- Writing, phonics and number are a strong focus and, as a result, children's skills in these areas by the time they leave Reception are at least good. The effective use of assessment information ensures that provision and learning are matched closely to children's needs. Adults have very positive relationships with children and also parents, who describe staff as 'easy to talk to' and 'fantastic'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to keep a close eye on ensuring that pupils are challenged and extended in lessons to think more deeply about their work and practise their reasoning skills
- the creative curriculum already being developed stimulates and excites all learners
- every opportunity is taken to learn from each other and share best practice.

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

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector
Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your assistant headteacher, members of your middle leadership team and the member of staff responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I also met with pupils, four governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of Lancashire local authority. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the six responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of 12 parents spoken to before or during the school day. I took account of three responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' achievement, your school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, behaviour and incident logs and documents relating to safeguarding.

As part of this inspection, five lines of enquiry were followed:

- How have key issues from the previous inspection been addressed, sustained and moved further on?
- How well does the school cater for those pupils that are the most able or potentially most-able to achieve all they are capable of?
- Have leaders accelerated the progress of pupils in the present Year 6 and Year 2 cohorts?
- What are pupils' starting points, as this would indicate the progress made through school?
- What is the story behind the high rates of absence of disadvantaged pupils?