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Mr Gareth Hollinghurst
Higham St John's Church of England Primary School
Higham Hall Road
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Dear Mr Hollinghurst

Short inspection of Higham St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained a good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Along with staff and governors, you take great pride in the school and place at the heart of the school the principle of developing well-rounded young people who are eager learners and ready for the next stages of education. Parents appreciate the work leaders and staff do to foster good attitudes to learning. One parent wrote: 'My daughter loves all aspects of her school life. I am thoroughly satisfied with how the school has helped my daughter flourish and I am proud of all her achievements.' Pupils also express highly positive views about the school, typified by one who said: 'School is much better than being at home, it is exciting and challenges you. It makes your brain work'.

Areas for improvement identified at the school's last inspection included: raising attainment further and accelerating pupils' progress by making greater use of individual improvement targets; extending opportunities for pupils to assess for themselves how well they are doing and promoting pupils' self-confidence. Work in pupils' books, the outcomes of national assessments and the manner in which pupils felt confident to speak with me indicate that you have acted successfully on these priorities.

Outcomes have improved since the last inspection. By the time they leave the school, pupils reach standards above those found nationally, particularly in reading. All pupils, including all those who are disadvantaged, make the progress that is

expected in reading and writing and nearly all do so in mathematics by the time they leave your school. The overall proportion of pupils who make better than expected progress at the end of Key Stage 2 is above that seen nationally. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and early years make good progress from their starting points because you ensure that they receive good-quality teaching and support.

Boys do not achieve quite as well as girls in the early years and Key Stage 1. Leaders and teachers are taking appropriate action to improve the proportion of boys achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception and to accelerate the progress of boys in Years 1 and 2. Similarly, leaders have rightly prioritised the need to accelerate further the progress of pupils in Key Stage 1 who are disadvantaged so that the gap in attainment between this group and others nationally closes.

All pupils benefit greatly from the wide range of enrichment activities that the school provides, including the multitude of clubs run by your staff and external partners. Additional educational trips to London and to local and national museums engage pupils, particularly boys. Through their exciting curriculum, pupils develop a greater understanding of British values and the world in which they live and are able to apply this knowledge to their work in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured the school has robust and effective policies and procedures for the safety and for the safeguarding of pupils. Procedures for the appointment of staff are rigorous and appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children. Staff are well trained regarding safeguarding, including child protection and online safety. Teachers have a secure understanding of their statutory duty and are diligent in protecting pupils from threats from extremism and radicalisation. Teachers fulfil their duties under equalities legislation well as a result of the training and support they receive. They cover protected characteristics effectively, including those related to religion, gender and sexual orientation. Consequently, pupils feel safe in school and are eager to attend. They say that bullying is rare and staff quickly and effectively deal with any that happens.

Inspection findings

- You have been appointed to the substantive post of headteacher from the position of acting headteacher since the last inspection. You have successfully conveyed your aspirations and priorities for further improvement to all your colleagues in school. You have boundless energy and enthusiasm alongside a professional commitment to seeking the best for the pupils in the school. This spirit motivates and inspires your staff. Consequently, there is a common vision shared by all staff and governors to develop pupils who are future citizens and who achieve well academically.
- You and your leadership team have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of rigorous analysis of assessment

information underpinned by thorough scrutiny of the work in pupils' books. You have provided excellent support to staff by coaching them through teaching lessons together. Your direct work in classes has given you valuable opportunities to see staff and pupils at work. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness has been supported through this strategy.

- You have developed assessment systems that allow teachers to track accurately the achievement of pupils against the age-related expectations. You have focused particularly on developing the assessment of pupils' writing. By ensuring that teachers check the accuracy of their assessments, both within school and with other schools in the local area, you have taken clear steps to ensure the consistency and reliability of assessment. Your senior leaders use the analysis of regular assessments to hold teachers to account during regular progress meetings. This analysis, however, is less frequently used to inform planning or check that particular actions are having the desired effect. The exception to this is the school profiles compiled for children with special educational needs. These profiles are detailed, highly informative and effectively used to aid the transition of pupils to new groups or teachers.
- Governors share your high expectations and regularly challenge the school through sharply focused questions. The professional skills of some governors, including those with expertise in education and those from industry, enable the governing body's strategic evaluation of the school's performance. Governors regularly visit the school; this enables them to check independently the accuracy of information they receive.
- You have thought carefully about the content of the school development plan. It is focused rightly on the key areas for improvement in the school including the enhancement of outcomes in the early years and the acceleration of boys' progress, particularly in writing and in Key Stage 1. The plan is well structured but it lacks clear measurable milestones that would enable the governing body to check easily that actions are on schedule to produce the desired outcomes.
- The quality of teaching continues to be good. Teachers plan exciting and adventurous activities for pupils that engage them in learning. For example, I observed children in the early years as they hunted different types of light source around the school as part of their investigations into Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb. Meanwhile, pupils in Years 3 and 4 were able to explain clearly how they would ensure their science investigation into friction, linked to their study of the novel *The Iron Man*, would be conducted as a fair test. Teachers and teaching assistants ask good questions to draw out pupils' understanding. Teachers are adept at guiding pupils into finding their own solutions. Consequently, pupils develop confidence and are capable of conducting their own effective research into topics. On occasions teachers sometimes do not make best use of opportunities to adapt activities to boost boys' progress.
- Phonics (the sounds letters make) is taught well across early years and Key Stage 1. Pupils receive the most appropriate content related to their stages of development. Phonics teaching is generally, but not consistently, brisk. There is some minor inconsistency in the implementation of agreed strategies such as

'finger phonics' in some groups. The small number of pupils who do not reach the required standards in phonics by the time they leave Year 2 are supported further in Year 3 by teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, nearly all quickly catch up. Teachers frequently target questions to boys to encourage participation and build confidence while individual support is also used well to help boys to improve.

- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Topics are chosen carefully to include activities that are appealing to all pupils and particularly boys.
- Pupils reach standards above those seen nationally in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Key Stage 2. They make good progress from their starting points. In Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment is similar to national averages in reading and mathematics but lower than that seen nationally for writing. Although most pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1, boys attain less well than girls in reading and writing.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well because of the effective decisions you and your governors make about how to use the pupil premium funding. (This is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.) The entitlement you provide to a specific slot of time each week for one-to-one tuition and support for all disadvantaged pupils helps those who are less able and the most able to make good progress.
- Outcomes for children in the early years have risen. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development has risen and is above the national figure. Progress is improving in the early years, particularly for boys, because of the actions of leaders and teachers. Teachers' effective analysis of outcomes identified the need to develop children's, and particularly boys', fine motor skills and coordination. Teachers now provide specific activities which are proving to be effective in developing these skills.
- The local authority provides limited support for this good school, recognising the capacity of leaders to self-manage the school's improvement. Additionally, the school supports the local authority through the secondment of staff on occasions to bring additional leadership capacity to other schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress made by boys particularly in Key Stage 1 and in writing is accelerated to match that of the girls by:
 - sharpening further the use and focus of targeted activities to accelerate boys' learning
 - continuing to enhance the school's new assessment systems to evaluate the impact of teaching on groups, so teachers know what is working and adjust their teaching to have best impact on boys' rates of progress and attainment.

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 County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, teaching staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. I also met with the local authority's adviser who is linked with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons, around the school or in meetings. I spoke to a parent by telephone at their request and took account of parents' written views of the school. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and look at their work. I considered information about pupils' progress and attainment and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. I conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, risk assessments, training, safeguarding checks and record-keeping. I also looked at the provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational or medical needs.