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Mr Tim Barnes
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Dear Mr Barnes

Short inspection of Alkrington Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have developed a caring and inclusive community where everyone is valued. Since the previous inspection, you have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching and raise the achievement of pupils across the school. You have your finger on the pulse of the school. Your evaluation of the school's work is honest and accurate. The great majority of parents and carers who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. As one parent commented, 'My child is happy and has settled in really well.'

You and your governors have instilled a culture of high expectations which is shared by staff and pupils. You have worked with governors to establish the priorities for improvement. Governors want the best for pupils. One commented, 'We want children to have a broad education and contribute to the success of the community.' Governors provide highly effective challenge and support. They visit the school regularly and check the accuracy of the information you provide.

The school's motto, 'a learning journey', underpins all that the school does. Pupils' work is celebrated in corridors and in bright, stimulating classrooms. Pupils are friendly and respectful. They behave well around the school and wear their uniform with pride. Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning in lessons. They work well with each other regardless of ethnicity or background. A typical comment from pupils is: 'Teachers are kind and always there to help.'

The curriculum is well planned. Pupils value the opportunities they have to take part in a range of sports, trips and residential visits. These include dance, netball and basketball. Older pupils have completed a bicycle training course, learning about how to stay safe while cycling on the road. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for example through being sports leaders and members of the eco council. Pupils' spiritual, cultural, social and moral development is fostered well. Pupils learn about other cultures and faiths. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

You have ensured that reading skills are taught well across the school. Pupils acquire these skills through regular opportunities to read with an adult. I heard pupils successfully apply their phonic knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. For the last three years, the proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been above the national average.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Teachers are given opportunities to observe each other teach and share strong practice across the school. Most teachers ensure that they plan learning so that all pupils, including the more able, are challenged to achieve their best. Pupils have opportunities to develop both their writing skills and the use of technical vocabulary in a wide range of subjects. Pupils enjoy writing, and this is reflected in the strong progress score in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2017.

You know the areas where you can improve, for example by ensuring that disadvantaged pupils reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. You acknowledge the need to develop the role of new middle leaders in monitoring and improving their subject areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in all aspects of school life. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils are thorough. Regular training and updates take place so that staff and governors are well prepared to deal with any issues that arise. You and your team work well with external agencies. Referrals are dealt with promptly and timely action is taken. Pupils feel safe. Pupils spoken to during the inspection say that bullying is rare. They feel that staff are approachable and say that they know who they can turn to if they have any concerns. The overwhelming majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, felt that their children are safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which related to attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is shown by their attendance, which is above the national average. However, absence for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was higher than the national average in 2016. Leaders and the welfare officer work closely with families. You have introduced a range of incentives and rewards to encourage all pupils to come to school regularly and on time. The pupil premium funding supports eligible pupils to attend breakfast club. Consequently, attendance rates for these pupils have improved and are now broadly in line with the national average.
- The second focus for the inspection related to pupils' progress in mathematics. Compared with 2016, provisional data for 2017 indicates that the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics dropped slightly at the end of key stage 2. You have developed well-thought-out plans to address this. You have invested in additional resources to help teachers to plan work which is more carefully matched to pupils' needs. You have provided effective training for teachers that has had a positive impact on pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem solving. My review of your current assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that pupils are making good progress in mathematics.
- You recognise that disadvantaged pupils did not make rapid enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 in 2016 and 2017. Leaders know the barriers to learning for these pupils very well. They carefully track pupils' progress and ensure that additional support is put in place for pupils who are underachieving. Inspection evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils are now catching up. However, you have rightly identified that disadvantaged pupils still need to reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced changes in staffing including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher in September 2017. You have forged a committed group of leaders who work cohesively as a strong team. Staff who responded to the inspection survey said that the school is well led and that they enjoy their work. Some middle leaders are new in post and are enthusiastic about their roles. You have plans in place to develop their roles in monitoring and improving their subject areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the standards that disadvantaged pupils reach in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 improve further
- they develop the role of middle leaders in monitoring and improving their subject areas.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rochdale. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and a group of senior and middle leaders. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative of the local authority. I met formally with pupils and also spoke with other pupils during breaktime. I visited a number of classes where I observed teaching and learning, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils. I listened to pupils read. I scrutinised pupils' work across the school. Parents talked with me as they dropped their children off at school. In addition, I took account of 66 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 40 free-text responses. I also considered the views of five staff and four pupils through Ofsted's online questionnaires. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' attainment and progress. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies about keeping children safe, records of training, safeguarding checks, and attendance and behaviour information. I also undertook a review of the school's website.