

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



24 April 2018

Mrs Carolyn Morris
Headteacher
Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School
Newton Street
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 1NE

Dear Mrs Morris

Short inspection of Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 April 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 September 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 continue to lead by example in your headteacher role within the school and in helping other headteachers raise standards in their schools. You and your very able deputy headteacher ensure that staff morale is high by valuing all that they do and making sure that everyone works together as a team. You set challenging targets to enable pupils to make good progress and staff to reach their full potential. You state on your website that you 'encourage children to enjoy learning, achieve their best, behave well, support each other and grow in confidence', and you certainly do.

You, senior leaders and governors have an accurate and reflective view of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school improvement plans include precise actions to make sure that all pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education, and for life generally. We discussed the need to develop the skills of the governing body so that they can closely check on the impact of actions, both using internal tracking of pupils' progress and published reports.

At the previous inspection in 2013, inspectors asked the leadership team, including governors, to ensure that work is matched closely to all pupils' needs so that they are consistently challenged and make the best possible progress. You insist on high standards across all aspects of school life. You and your leadership team ensure that teachers plan activities to meet the needs of all pupils, whatever their abilities

and whenever they start at your school. You provide teachers with opportunities to share best practice, both across and beyond the school. For example, your staff work with teachers from other schools to ensure accuracy in their assessment of pupils' progress. You and the senior leadership team lead by example and provide a raft of support for your staff team. Teaching is now consistently good across subjects and stages.

Inspectors also asked you to raise attainment and progress in reading so that they match those of writing and mathematics. Attainment in reading has risen but it was not at the national average by the end of Year 6 in 2017. Reading now has a high profile across your school and there are improvements across current year groups. Pupils are developing a keenness to read, although some do not read often enough at home.

In addition, inspectors asked that you increase the amount of opportunities to share best practice across and beyond the school. You ensure that there are many opportunities to share best practice, both across and beyond the school. You and several members of the senior leadership team have considerable expertise and work with teachers in other schools to improve their practice.

You and your staff ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. Many children have skills that are much lower than is typical for their age, particularly in speech and language, and in personal development and social skills. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development was close to the national average in 2017. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards by the end of key stage 2 in writing and mathematics was similar to the national average in 2017. The proportion reaching the expected standard in reading was lower than the national average in Year 6 in 2017 but current key stage 2 cohorts show an improving picture, having had the benefit of better teaching in the early years and key stage 1.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and love learning. This is reflected in high levels of attendance by the vast majority of pupils. As you say on your website, the vision for the school is for everyone in your school community to 'go the extra mile and only accept their best', and this is clearly embedded throughout your school. Parents commented that 'from the Nursery class through to Year 6, this school is amazing'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. The designated safeguarding leader and deputies make sure that staff fully understand their duty and follow systems and procedures for logging concerns. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. When I arrived at the start of the inspection, the effectiveness of procedures to check on those visiting school was clear to see.

You make sure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a high profile. You provide staff with regular up-to-date training, so that they and

members of the governing body understand the current guidance. You and the safeguarding team are prompt in making referrals to the local authority. Together, you diligently follow up all concerns and make sure that pupils are kept safe. You work well with a range of external agencies to secure expertise to support pupils' welfare, as and when necessary. You and your staff provide exceptional care and support for pupils and their families. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I looked at how effectively you and your staff are engaging with parents and carers, particularly but not exclusively in supporting pupils' reading. In a meeting with parents, they told me how you and your staff have a real focus on reading, and this was reiterated in parents' free-text responses. Parents are extremely appreciative of the personal time that staff freely give to provide workshops in English and in Urdu to develop parental understanding of the importance of reading at home. Parents are helped in developing their own English language skills as, for many, English is not their first language. A significant proportion do not speak English when they first arrive in the local community. Your staff work with parents to build their confidence in developing a range of ways they can encourage their children to read. Records show that books are regularly changed and that more pupils are reading at home. However, this remains a focus for the school. Your deputy headteacher is a lynchpin, working with other staff to grow what is a highly positive relationship with families and the wider local community.
- I also looked at how effectively leaders and managers are monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Within school, you ensure that all staff regularly undertake peer-to-peer observations. Senior and middle leaders observe lessons, carry out learning walks, undertake work scrutinies and moderate the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Your leadership team works closely with colleagues in other schools to continually review how it can improve ways of working at St Thomas' School. There are regular opportunities to share skills, and this is having an impact on improvements to the quality of teaching. You have continued to build an exceptionally skilled leadership team which is highly ambitious for every pupil. This has enabled the deputy headteacher to effectively manage the school when you are coaching headteachers in other schools. Some senior leaders deliver training for other schools, based on their specialisms, and this illustrates the high quality of leadership and management, at all levels, in your school. The impact is seen in the good progress pupils make from when they start at your school.
- You ensure that the curriculum offers an extensive range of learning experiences, including visits to towns, cities and to the theatre. Teachers give freely of their time to organise residential opportunities to outdoor-education centres. Pupils get a first-hand experience of the range of cultures and faiths in Britain today. Pupils told me how much they enjoy opportunities to explore places that are different to their local community. You and leaders ensure that all aspects of the primary

curriculum are covered and there is an appropriate balance between subjects. A raft of extra-curricular activities, such as swimming, ukulele, gardening and computer clubs, extend pupils' experiences. Parents commented on the way that 'this school does not just provide an education, it encourages children to develop their character'. Teachers ensure that topics link subjects together and bring learning to life. Pupils were bursting with excitement as they told me about their recent residential trip to France. They were able to use their knowledge of the French language to buy items from the locals and this gave them a great sense of achievement. You and the staff are highly skilled in finding imaginative ways to motivate pupils.

- Finally, I was very taken with the behaviour of pupils. They are a credit to you in the way they show a deep level of respect towards each other, the adults around them and to visitors to the school. All pupils are keen to learn new things and develop new skills. You, your deputy headteacher and the leadership team go to great lengths to identify and reduce any barriers to learning. This enables all pupils to get a good start in life, both in their personal development and in their academic achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff continue to work with parents to encourage children's enjoyment in reading beyond school
- the skills of members of the governing body are developed further.

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 Blackburn with Darwen. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I observed teaching and learning jointly with you and the deputy headteacher. I held meetings with subject leaders, senior leaders, members of the governing body and the safeguarding team. I analysed 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and I spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. I also took account of 11 free-text responses from parents. I spoke to several staff informally during the day. I held a meeting with pupils and spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. During the inspection, I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation; records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; the school website; school policies; pupils' work and their reading logs.