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Mrs Maggie Teachen
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Teachen

Short inspection of Bickerstaffe Voluntary Controlled Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a small school with a strong feeling of community. Leaders, staff and governors are determined to give pupils a broad, enjoyable education. This involves pupils in many worthwhile activities, such as the running club or caring for the school chickens: Rice Crispy, Muffin Junior and Peanut. All pupils responding to Ofsted's survey said that they participate in extra-curricular clubs. Parents and carers told me how pleased they are with the opportunities on offer for pupils. By the time that pupils leave the school they are confident, eager learners. They achieve well in a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, reading and writing.

Pupils learn to care for the local community, for example by singing or presenting gifts to elderly people. Staff and pupils are proud to be part of the school, with its history starting in 1844. Leaders plan school events that deliberately involve or celebrate the people of Bickerstaffe. Pupils and parents are excited about a forthcoming, full-size mock wedding at the school. This event is planned to help them think about the imminent royal wedding of His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales and Meghan Markle.

Leaders make certain that staff understand the higher expectations of the new national curriculum. Staff expect pupils to learn and to succeed. They challenge pupils often, including the most able, in lessons.

When inspectors last visited the school, staff were asked to give pupils more chances to solve real-life problems. You have achieved this by making sure that teachers are skilful and confident in their teaching. They plan challenging activities for pupils, for example in mathematics. Inspectors also recommended that pupils have more opportunities to read. This is now a distinctive aspect of the school. Leaders and staff promote the joy of reading successfully. Pupils read often to themselves, staff and to one another. Even so, we agreed that leaders should set more precise actions for staff to improve the reading skills of pupils in lower key stage 2. We also agreed that pupils should be clear about how they can improve their own reading ability.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the work of subject leaders. All current teachers are new to the school and you joined as headteacher in September 2017. You have reviewed the roles of staff and many now have new leadership responsibilities. You are taking considered steps to help staff to develop their skills and confidence to coordinate and support the work of their colleagues.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, staff and governors attend regular training about keeping pupils safe. They are alert to the main local safeguarding risks to pupils. Leaders double-check that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders keep detailed records of issues affecting individual pupils. They consider information about pupils thoroughly to identify what further actions staff should take. Parents say that staff and leaders are available each day to speak with them. Pupils who responded to the Ofsted survey said that they feel able to raise any concerns they have. Staff teach pupils to stay safe when cycling on the roads or when meeting strangers. Leaders share information regularly with parents to advise them how to keep their children safe when online at home. Governors check the safeguarding work of the school adequately. For example, they ascertain that the school educates pupils to use the internet safely.

Inspection findings

- Leaders review the quality of teaching accurately, including in mathematics. They make sure that staff have access to a wide range of training, as well as opportunities to visit other schools. Teachers are confident in their work. They plan thoroughly how to challenge and support pupils, including the most able, in their learning. For example, pupils in Year 6 grappled confidently with rounding up the numbers of people attending the recent Olympic Games. Pupils responded ably. They told me how much they enjoy their learning and that such challenges are frequent in their lessons across subjects. I was impressed when they explained confidently to me the benefits of being able to apply their skills to real-life situations.
- I also focused on the role of subject leaders. You ensure that staff help one another to develop their expertise as subject leaders. For example, the former English coordinator is working closely with the new subject leader to plan for

improvement. Together, they have an informed understanding of how well children from the early years to pupils in Year 6 are learning to communicate, read and write. The changes you are making to leadership in other subjects are supporting staff to develop their management skills. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work on pupils' achievement.

- Teachers' strong knowledge of how pupils learn and of the teaching of reading gives pupils a positive start to learning to read. This is particularly so in the early years and key stage 1. Pupils enthuse about letter sounds because staff make phonics lessons challenging and interesting. Leaders and staff are taking thoughtful action to improve pupils' reading skills in key stage 2 because their attainment has been below the national average. Pupils now read well. Staff plan the curriculum carefully to give pupils many opportunities to enjoy a wide range of different types of stories. Throughout the school, staff work closely with pupils to improve the quality and availability of books in the school library and in book areas in classrooms. Staff plan many activities to promote reading, such as pupils dressing as their favourite Roald Dahl character. Leaders reward pupils for reading often. Leaders and staff use information precisely to pinpoint where pupils require extra help. Pupils now make good progress in reading. Even so, we agreed that you need to take even more action to improve the reading skills of pupils in lower key stage 2.
- Some pupils told me that they enjoy the books read to them at school so much that they ask their parents to buy copies at home. Parents with whom I spoke said that their children benefit from the school's well-developed approach to developing reading skills. During the inspection, I established that some pupils in keys stage 2 lack a clear understanding of how to become even better readers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take more action to improve pupils' reading skills in lower key stage 2 and make sure that all pupils are clear about how to improve their reading.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you to discuss your self-evaluation, as well as safeguarding and behaviour. You and I visited some classes to observe pupils' activities. I listened to some pupils from key stage 2 read. I met with the leader and co-leader for English. I held a meeting with five governors, including the chair. I met with your link adviser from Lancashire local authority. I spoke informally with parents as they dropped their children off at school. I considered the 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the six responses to Ofsted's free-text facility. I considered the views of 11 pupils and nine staff given in response to Ofsted's surveys. I looked at a range of school documentation, including reviews of pupils' progress and attainment. With you and the school bursar, I reviewed school records of checks of the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils. I reviewed examples of your records of the safeguarding and behaviour of pupils.