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18 June 2018

Mr Alan Hemmings
Headteacher
Sharples Primary School
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Dear Mr Hemmings

Short inspection of Sharples Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school provides a warm and welcoming environment for pupils, parents and carers. Pupils' behaviour in class and around school is typically good. They are polite and friendly towards one another, and have positive relationships with their teachers. Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of experiences that the school has provided for them, including trips to places such as Jodrell Bank and extra-curricular clubs including dodgeball and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). They generally want to work hard and achieve, although some do allow their minds to wander in lessons where teaching is less engaging.

Pupils benefit from a well-organised, broad and balanced curriculum. Art is a particular strength of the school, and there are many impressive displays around school where pupils have produced pieces of art in the style of different famous artists, including Hundertwasser, Mondrian, Degas and Georgia O'Keeffe. Other subjects are also well covered. Pupils were able to tell me how they had developed their skills as scientists by carrying out practical experiments, conducted research about places around the world and developed their historical knowledge by studying topics such as the Mayans and the Battle of Hastings.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and attend the Vision Impairment Resource Base is also a strength of the school. For most of the time, pupils integrate seamlessly into lessons with their peers. They

also benefit from sessions of high-quality, individualised support led by highly knowledgeable and experienced staff. As a result, they make good progress academically, learn important skills in working independently and become more self-confident.

While the school has a number of strengths, there are also some key aspects that are in need of improvement. The previous inspection asked you to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching in English. Efforts to meet this challenge have only been partially successful. For example, reading has been given a high priority in school and, overall, pupils are now building more effectively on the good start they get learning phonics in early years and Year 1. Current pupils' attainment in reading is largely improving, but there are marked variations from class to class. Published data and the school's own current assessment information, show that outcomes for pupils in English and mathematics are not as consistently strong as they should be. This is because there are significant inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school. In some year groups, progress is swift and attainment good. However, in other year groups, progress is considerably slower and pupils are not reaching the standards of which they are capable.

Eliminating these inconsistencies in teaching is leaders' key priority, and some steps have already been taken. Roles within the senior and middle leadership team have been reassigned, so it is now clear whose responsibility it is to lead improvements in teaching and learning, or to analyse assessment information. Leaders have an effective working partnership with the local authority, and this has helped to ensure that the school's self-evaluation is realistic about the challenges ahead. Governors acknowledge that they have not consistently challenged senior leaders, and their skills in asking searching questions and holding leaders to account are in need of improvement. While there is much work to do, there is no doubting leaders' commitment to the school or their determination to secure the improvements that the school currently requires.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on staff and governors to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. These checks are recorded diligently. Staff and governors receive regular training covering different aspects of safeguarding. As a result, staff understand the procedures to follow if they are worried about a pupil's welfare, and leaders ensure that any such concerns are followed up swiftly.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including when using the internet or crossing the road. They know that different types of bullying exist, including cyber bullying, but have no concerns about bullying in their school. They say that staff look after them well. This was confirmed by the parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, all of whom said that their children are safe and happy in school.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at how effectively reading is being taught. Published data shows that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading has been below average for the past two years in key stage 1, and had risen from below average to be in line with the national average over the same period in key stage 2. Not enough of the most able pupils have reached the highest standards of attainment in reading.
- Although there are inconsistencies in the overall quality of teaching, strategies that leaders have introduced have had a generally positive impact on pupils' reading levels. Phonics is taught well, and by the end of key stage 1 almost all pupils are able to use their phonic knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. There is also now a more regular, focused approach to teaching reading comprehension, which is improving pupils' understanding of the texts they are reading. Across the school, pupils say that they enjoy reading, and pupils in Year 6 confidently make and explain book choices based, for example, on authors who have featured as 'author of the month' in their class. The proportion of most-able pupils currently achieving the higher standards is rising in Year 6, but remains stubbornly below average in Year 2.
- My second line of enquiry concerned the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Over time, disadvantaged pupils' attainment has been typically much lower than that of both other pupils in the school and others nationally. Current assessment information shows that this continues to be the case, and fewer than half of disadvantaged pupils are working at the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have put together a detailed plan for the use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. However, too little of the plan focuses on rapidly closing attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others. Targets set for disadvantaged pupils are unambitious.
- The focus of the third line of enquiry was the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement in key stage 1. Attainment at the end of Year 2 was below average in reading and mathematics, in both 2016 and 2017, but in line with the national average in writing. Evidence in pupils' books and the school's tracking data shows that this pattern is continuing for current pupils. The secure start children make in the early years, where the proportion achieving a good level of development is typically in line with other schools nationally, and the strong progress they then make in phonics are not effectively built upon. Inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching slow rates of progress, including for most-able pupils. Teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve are not consistently high enough, and this leads too often to pupils engaging in learning activities that lack challenge or unnecessarily repeating prior learning.
- While safeguarding is effective and pupils' overall standard of behaviour around school is good, there has been a significant dip in pupils' overall attendance this year. Despite leaders' efforts to reward regular attendance and reduce the number of pupils arriving late each day, the improvements seen in attendance in 2017 have not been sustained. At the same time, the proportion of pupils

regularly missing school has risen significantly, so that currently more than 1 in 7 pupils are persistently absent from school. Leaders have recently brokered support from the local authority in order to try to help to reverse this trend.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they quickly eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school, so that pupils make consistently good progress in all year groups and across all subjects
- the pupil premium funding is used more effectively to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils
- the current decline in pupils' attendance and rise in persistent absenteeism are reversed
- governors improve their skills in holding school leaders fully to account for the achievement of all groups of pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, other school leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also met a group of staff and a group of pupils. I held a discussion about reading with a group of older pupils and heard a group of younger pupils read. I considered 12 responses from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free-text comments, 20 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 15 responses to the staff survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work from a range of subjects and year groups. I also looked at documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.