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Mrs Helen Kelly
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Dear Mrs Helen Kelly

Short inspection of Norley CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your school's motto 'happy hearts enquiring minds' perfectly captures the school's spirit and purpose. Many parents and carers say how much their children enjoy school. They pay tribute to your endless drive for improvement and the work of your staff in nurturing and educating their children. The school's safe and inclusive nature also receives high praise from parents. A unique aspect of the school's ethos is its warm, family atmosphere. Each pupil is known and valued as an individual.

You lead an enthusiastic and committed staff team who rise well to the high expectations you set for their teaching. Together, you ensure that pupils have imaginative and memorable experiences that strengthen and build on their prior learning. All of these factors result in pupils making strong progress and achieving well across the curriculum. By the end of Reception, Year 2 and Year 6, pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics are regularly above average and frequently well above average. Across the school, reading is a particular strength. By the end of Year 6, progress and standards in reading are some of the highest in the country.

You regularly evaluate the school's work. This provides you with a very clear view of its strengths and enables you to prioritise improvements. Last year, these included pupils' weaker performance in spelling, punctuation and grammar. You have maintained a focus on this aspect. As a result, pupils' work and the school's assessment information show marked improvements. You have also concentrated on improving pupils' handwriting and presentation. Although improvements are also apparent here, the quality of both aspects is still inconsistent in upper key stage 2.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Stronger teaching is ensuring that the most able pupils are now being challenged effectively. This is evident in pupils' work, the school's assessment information and pupils' national test and assessment results. Across the school, increasingly more pupils are now working at greater depth in their writing. This is also the case in mathematics. Teachers now ensure that pupils master and deepen their understanding of mathematical ideas before moving on to new learning. Teachers now identify relevant opportunities for pupils to use and apply mathematics in other subjects. You have secured good improvements to subject leadership. Subject leaders now consider a telling range of information to help them to evaluate the impact that teaching and the curriculum have on pupils' learning.

Staff respect your leadership and value the provision you make for their professional development. This includes time to reflect on and debate teaching methods and opportunities to gain professional leadership qualifications. In this way, you are strengthening the school's capacity for improvement.

Pupils behave very well and are excellent ambassadors for the school. They have well-developed social skills and are polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils listen carefully to teachers and participate fully in their learning. Pupils' good understanding of Christian values gives them a useful insight to comparable principles within fundamental British values. Pupils also learn about these principles in some topic work and when studying various subjects. However, this practice is not consistent. You agreed that your school's curriculum should provide better opportunities for pupils to learn about fundamental British values.

Governors bring a wide range of useful experience to their role. The governing body shares your ambition to give pupils the best education and care possible. Governors undertake training to keep their skills up to date, visit the school regularly to meet pupils and staff and to observe school policies in action. Governors ask you and other leaders probing questions to ensure that they have an accurate view of the school's work and effectiveness.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff, governors and everyone who works with children are thoroughly vetted. Staff receive regular training on all aspects of child protection and know that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. Your records show that staff are vigilant in referring any concerns to you and that you are quick to follow these up.

The actions you take are detailed and clear. Where appropriate, you seek advice and support from other professionals.

You ensure that the curriculum educates pupils about how to keep safe. Pupils can explain different types of bullying and know what to do if they experience this. They consider that this type of behaviour is rare. Your behaviour records bear this out and show that any allegations are investigated thoroughly. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Those who spoke to me explained the thoughtful support you have put in place for pupils to share and discuss any worries they might have.

You place a strong emphasis on educating pupils about keeping safe online. Pupils' explanations and the multimedia presentations that they have created demonstrate the depth of their understanding on this matter. You also provide parents with useful information to help keep their children safe when using technology.

Inspection findings

- Underpinning pupils' excellent progress and high standards in reading is the strong focus you give to reading for pleasure. During our visits to classrooms, we saw many examples of pupils engrossed in books and discussing books with a friend. Indeed, pupils' work shows that much of their learning is inspired by interesting and emotive fiction, poetry and information books. You also ensure that pupils are taught essential reading skills. In Reception and Year 1, very effective teaching enables pupils to gain a secure understanding of letters and the sounds they represent. As such, the vast majority of pupils reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Any pupils who do not attain this standard in Year 1 do so by the end of Year 2. During key stage 2, teachers build well on this strong foundation, teaching pupils more advanced reading skills such as inference. This deepens pupils' understanding of different texts and increases their enjoyment of reading. More reluctant readers are supported through tailored programmes of work, including some innovative practice using a 'therapy dog' to develop pupils' confidence and fluency.
- Your priority to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar prompted effective changes to the way that these aspects are taught. This has resulted in marked improvements in pupils' standards. You have increased the frequency of lessons that focus specifically on these skills. Teachers also expect pupils to ensure that their written work in all subjects includes accurate spellings, punctuation and grammar. Spelling homework and tests in school now give a greater emphasis to pupils learning spelling rules.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' learning in all subjects show that pupils achieve well across the curriculum. Throughout the school, you ensure that pupils have a wealth of interesting learning experiences. Reception children quickly become absorbed in the wide range of stimulating activities. These include numerous opportunities for them to practise literacy and numeracy skills through play and the learning challenges set by staff. For example, the children made their own outdoor hopscotch to help them count in tens. Across the school, all pupils benefit from working with a variety of specialists. These include sports coaches, authors, musicians and professional artists. The stunning quality of pupils' art

work is a clear example of their high standards in this subject. In science, older pupils are challenged to think scientifically when using data to make predictions. In geography, pupils in key stage 1 learn to identify features of the environment on maps and consider the idea of scale. Outdoor learning is a feature of all subjects. Pupils say that this inspires them. Older pupils' vivid descriptions and poems about the seasons, storms, fires and the wilderness are testament to this. An appealing range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities add richness to the curriculum.

- Your school's inclusive culture allows pupils to develop positive attitudes to diversity and appreciate the idea of equality. Pupils explain that everyone is unique and special. They know why prejudice-based language and behaviour is wrong and explain that they would not hesitate to challenge this. Through the curriculum, pupils debate a variety of moral and social issues and learn to respect different cultures and religions. You ensure that all class libraries include books that reflect the full range of diversity in modern Britain. This is a positive picture. Nevertheless, you recognise that the potential of the curriculum to deepen pupils' understanding of fundamental British values and equalities issues is not being fully capitalised upon.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum provides pupils with a deeper understanding of fundamental British values and equalities issues
- there is greater consistency in Year 5 and 6 pupils' handwriting and presentation.

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

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss leaders' evaluation of the school's work and priorities for improvement. I reviewed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding and behaviour. I met with seven governors and held a separate meeting with a representative from the local authority. We observed learning and behaviour in a sample of lessons. I reviewed a sample of pupils' topic work and the work they undertake in guided reading sessions. I held a formal discussion with a group of pupils and spoke to others informally at lunchtime. I spoke to some

parents as they brought their children to school. I considered 46 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, including 23 written comments. I took account of seven responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and three responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.