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Mrs Jacquelyn Young  
Headteacher  
St Stephen's Church of England Primary School  
Robinson Street  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB1 5PE

Dear Mrs Young

### **Short inspection of St Stephen's Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2019, 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 2015.

#### **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 very effective leadership means that the school is in an even stronger position now than at the time of the last inspection. You are ably assisted in realising your clear vision for the school by your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Indeed, strong leadership at all levels and a philosophy of continuous improvement are the reasons why this school has been on such an impressive journey in recent years.

A significant number of experienced teachers left to take up leadership positions at other schools at the end of the last academic year. This demonstrates the effectiveness of leadership development in the school. You have ensured that, despite a significant number of teachers being newly qualified, pupils continue to benefit from high-quality teaching.

You are rightly proud of your achievements but have a keen eye on the small number of areas where further attention is still required. Highly effective improvement planning means that leaders take appropriate actions to enable pupils to achieve their potential. Leaders are very adept at evaluating the impact of their

actions on pupils' progress.

In recent years, governors have been proactive in honing the way that they operate to ensure that they provide the school with strong strategic leadership. Governors possess the necessary skills and expertise to be able to support and challenge you and other leaders effectively. You work well with your school improvement partner as part of your ongoing improvement programme.

The responses to the staff online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. All those who responded enjoy working at the school and feel proud to be a member of staff here. Teachers feel truly valued and appreciate how much you consider their well-being. They particularly appreciate that you consider workload implications when introducing new initiatives. You have created a collaborative ethos in which all staff want to do their best for the pupils. This means that pupils feel valued and happy in school. In this nurturing environment pupils thrive and achieve well.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They value the help that they receive from their teachers and support staff. They particularly enjoy the wide range of after-school clubs. Pupils speak positively about how kind people are to each other in school. They are also positive about their learning. Those with whom I spoke were keen to tell me about what they had been learning about in history, geography, science and art.

You have taken decisive and effective action to address the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching across the school has continued to improve and this has had a positive impact on pupils' progress. Leaders' actions to improve pupils' comprehension skills are paying dividends. Your focus on strong leadership throughout the school means that the quality of subject leadership across the curriculum is now strong. The improvements that you have made to the outdoor space for children in the early years means that this is now a high-quality learning environment.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leadership of this aspect of the school's work is particularly impressive. Very effective systems underpin the culture that puts pupils' safety and well-being at the heart of the school. The strong community ethos of the school means that you and your staff know your pupils extremely well. Consequently, staff are well placed to spot any potential safeguarding issues. The school provides a safe, caring and orderly environment in which pupils can learn, play and flourish.

You ensure that all staff receive appropriate training so that they are confident about noticing any signs of potential abuse or neglect and understand the correct procedures to follow should that be the case. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, including protocols and practices for record-keeping. Systems to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to work with pupils in the school are secure.

### **Inspection findings**

- In response to my first line of enquiry for this inspection, you were able to demonstrate that the quality of teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection. Pupils across the school routinely benefit from strong teaching that enables them to make good progress and attain high standards. You have maintained this high-quality teaching this year, despite six newly qualified teachers starting in September. You have appointed strong teachers who are benefiting from personalised mentoring. A very effective programme of professional development has focused on ensuring that all teachers are able to match work well to pupils' needs.
- Pupils' progress in reading improved significantly in 2018 compared to the previous two years. During the inspection, I was interested to find out how you had brought this about. You explained how you have put reading at the heart of the curriculum, for example in the way that you use class novels. You understand how pupils' proficiency in reading underpins their success in a range of subjects. You have focused particularly on developing pupils' vocabulary and comprehension skills. A very high proportion of your pupils speak English as an additional language and this focus has had a very positive impact on their reading confidence and progress. The changes that you have made to how you structure shared reading activities have also helped pupils to make better progress. This focus on reading in school has led to many pupils reading widely and often in their own time. However, this is not the case for some pupils and you are working with families to try and remedy this.
- At the time of the last inspection, subject leadership across the curriculum was not as effective as that in English and mathematics. This is no longer the case. You have invested strongly in developing middle leaders in recent years. So successful has this investment been that several members of staff were promoted to leadership roles in other schools at the end of last year. Consequently, many subject leaders are new to their roles. However, they have wasted no time in bringing dynamic leadership to their respective areas. This enthusiastic group of leaders believes passionately in the importance of their subjects to the overall quality of pupils' education. You have empowered them to lead their subjects and given them the time to do this well. Crucially, you are providing them with the necessary support and training.
- At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the outdoor space for children in the early years. You have transformed this area into a varied and engaging learning environment. You sought external funding so that you could make a real difference to this outdoor space. The development of the early years area has been part of a wider school focus on creating high-quality outdoor spaces in which pupils can learn and play.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support newly qualified teachers and new subject leaders as they develop and hone their practice
- a greater proportion of pupils read widely and often to help them to make the best possible progress in reading.

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

Anne Seneviratne  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and the inclusion leader. I also met with five foundation subject leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and had a meeting with the school improvement partner and a representative of the local authority. I met formally with a group of pupils and talked informally with others in lessons and during morning break. I listened to a small number of pupils read. I also talked with parents informally at the start of the school day. Accompanied by you and the deputy headteacher, I observed teaching and learning across the school. Together with you, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, I scrutinised the wider curriculum work of a small group of pupils. I examined your self-evaluation document and development plan. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered the 32 free-text comments to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered the 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 18 responses to the one for pupils.