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Dear Adele Robinson

Short inspection of Dalton St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your governors have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement. You have used this knowledge to put in place a comprehensive development plan to further improve the school. You have tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection effectively. Consequently, pupils make good progress in reading. Most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, read fluently and with expression. They enjoy reading and have a range of favourite authors. The most able pupils in Years 5 and 6 are able to talk about characters, their motives and the impact of their actions. Pupils enjoy reading and also enjoy listening to their teacher read when she 'uses funny voices'.

In mathematics, current pupils, including the most able pupils, make good progress from their starting points. Teachers challenge the most able pupils to deepen their understanding. Consequently, a greater proportion of pupils than previously are working at the higher standards in mathematics.

Current lower- and middle-attaining pupils make good progress in writing. However, you acknowledge that the progress made in writing by the most able pupils is not as strong.

Subject leadership has been developed well. Teachers now have responsibility for a subject area and they monitor standards in their subjects. In mathematics and English, the monitoring of individual pupils' knowledge and understanding is well established. Subject leaders have a good understanding of strengths in their subjects and know where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers use this information when planning. The curriculum is planned to take account of the mixed-age classes and is tailored to pupils' needs and interests. Teachers work together to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Your teachers value the support they receive from you for their own development.

You continually strive for Dalton St Michael's to be the best that it can be. You acknowledge that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected and higher standards in writing can be increased across the school, including in the early years. You also acknowledge that the curriculum could be further developed to provide pupils with more opportunities to learn about different British and wider world cultures in order for pupils to be well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governors continually reflect on their own performance. As a result, they never stand still with their own development. They ask leaders challenging questions as they want the best for all pupils. They discuss groups of pupils but acknowledge that they 'perhaps don't ask as many questions as they should' about the progress of the most able pupils. Governors have a good understanding of their responsibilities around safeguarding and the publication of information on the schools' website. However, they are less clear about the work to promote British values or to develop pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures. Governors appreciate the quality of the information they receive from you.

Pupils are well behaved at all times and are thriving in the happy, supportive learning community you have created. Warm and respectful relationships between staff and pupils create a purposeful and productive atmosphere. Pupils' behaviour embodies the schools' mission statement of 'belong, believe and achieve'. Pupils want to do well because of the warm relationships that adults foster. Parents say that adults 'care about each and every child'. Older pupils play with and help younger pupils. Pupils are polite and well-mannered and were happy to talk to and help me.

Pupils value the support they get in lessons. One pupil told me that: 'My teacher never gives us the answers, she guides us because she knows we can do it.' Pupils are taught how to stay healthy and how to stay safe, including when online. They appreciate the wealth of experiences on offer, including after-school clubs. Pupils have a good understanding of British values of tolerance, mutual respect, democracy and the rule of law. They study different faiths but have limited knowledge of different cultures in Britain and the wider world.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They appreciate the way in which teachers enthuse pupils. One parent said that: 'My child cannot wait to tell us about the different learning experiences she has encountered throughout the day.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Your governors ensure that all policies and procedures are in place, including checks on the suitability of teachers and governors to work with children. Training for staff is comprehensive and up to date. You work closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive the support they need. Safeguarding is a consistent priority. You ensure that pupils are kept safe and any unknown absences are followed up swiftly. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- Pupils benefit from good teaching at all levels. Your staff use their good subject knowledge to ensure that teaching is matched well to pupils' needs. Consequently, most pupils currently in the school, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils are attentive in lessons and behave very well around school. There is a consistent approach to behaviour from all adults, which pupils understand. They behave very well in lessons because of the high expectations from adults. Pupils told me that 'adults expect you to behave well'.
- Children get a good start to their education in the early years. Adults develop warm and supportive relationships. The environment is stimulating and promotes learning well across the early years curriculum. Consequently, children in the Reception class make good progress from their starting points. However, you recognise that adults do not provide children with as many opportunities to write as they could, which limits the progress of the most able children.
- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was about leaders' actions to increase the rate of progress in mathematics so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards. In mathematics, current pupils make good progress from their starting points. This is the result of good teacher subject knowledge and clear explanations in lessons. Teachers challenge the most able pupils to explain what they are thinking and to use their knowledge to make generalisations about number patterns. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, pupils were asked to find out whether dividing an odd number by 2 always leaves a remainder. As a result of the teachers' support to help pupils to develop effective strategies, the pupils went on to make generalisations about dividing odd numbers by 4.
- Most-able pupils are given opportunities to investigate numbers and develop reasoning skills across school. Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 say that they enjoy the challenge they are given in mathematics and are confident to ask for help when they are unsure. They talked excitedly about their 'superhero challenges'.
- Another line of enquiry was focused on leaders' actions to improve standards in phonics at key stage 1 and grammar, punctuation and spelling at key stage 2 and the impact this has on current standards in writing. Adults demonstrate good subject knowledge in phonics. Children make rapid progress in the Reception class. They confidently use their knowledge of letter sounds to sound out words

and work out if they are real words or are made up. In Year 1 and Year 2, the rapid teaching of sounds enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers use a variety of teaching approaches which engage and enthuse pupils. For example, pupils used a sound mat to spell words by jumping on the correct letter sounds. As a result, the majority of pupils currently in Year 1 are on track to reach the expected standard.

- Grammar, punctuation and spelling is taught consistently across school. Teachers and other adults reinforce grammar, punctuation and spelling in English lessons. For example, in a teacher-led Reception session, the teacher asked children about sentence punctuation during phonics. In a Year 3 and Year 4 writing lesson, the teacher encouraged pupils to use their knowledge of grammar to construct interesting sentences. The teacher also praised the correct use of 'wouldn't have' rather than 'wouldn't of' in a piece of writing.
- Although grammar, punctuation and spelling is taught well across school, pupils do not consistently apply these skills in their writing, particularly in subjects other than English. You acknowledge that there are too few opportunities to practise and apply these skills across the curriculum apart from in science. Teachers do not have the same expectations in other subjects as they do in English. As a result, in some classes, presentation is poorer and grammar, punctuation and spelling is not used consistently well.
- I also looked at the actions that leaders are taking to reduce the small number of pupils who regularly miss school. You have recognised the issue and have worked with an attendance officer from the local authority to develop strategies to improve the attendance of these pupils. As a result, the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced since September. However, the small minority of pupils who continue to regularly miss school has had a detrimental effect on the overall absence data for the school, which is slightly below national averages. There are a significant number of families who take unauthorised holidays, which contributes to the below-average attendance rates.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils meet and exceed the expected standard in writing by:
 - ensuring that adults have the same high expectations of writing in other areas of the curriculum as they do in English
 - ensuring that pupils use grammar, punctuation and spelling skills consistently across all areas of the curriculum
 - giving pupils more opportunities to practise and apply their writing skills across the curriculum and in different areas of provision in the early years
- pupils develop a greater understanding of other cultures in Britain and the wider world.

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

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. You and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with 12 parents in the playground before school. I considered the 43 responses and the 18 free-text comments made by parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses to the staff questionnaire and the 31 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I heard several pupils read and observed pupils on the playground and in the dining hall.

I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record keeping. I talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.