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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Nicole Delamere
Headteacher
Marsden Community Primary School
Percy Street
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 0BE

Dear Mrs Delamere

Short inspection of Marsden Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your passion, commitment, drive and vision have been fundamental to the rapid improvements that the school has made since your appointment in 2016. Working with your talented deputy headteacher, you have re-energised the school. Consequently, outcomes across the school are on an upward trend.

Children are at the heart of everything that your school does. You and all your staff strive to ensure that all pupils achieve their very best. Since your appointment, you have made significant changes which have had a positive impact on pupils' progress and attainment. For example, you have formalised the appraisal and performance management system for all staff, holding them more to account for pupils' progress. Training is now much more focused on school priorities and is open to all staff. You have devised a tracking and assessment system and pupils' progress is now monitored with greater rigour.

All pupils make strong gains in their learning. In 2016, the progress that pupils made in writing at key stage 2, including those who are disadvantaged, was outstanding. This is a significant achievement of which you and your school should be very proud. Provisional results in 2017 show that progress in writing and mathematics is very strong at key stage 2, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Although the progress in reading at key stage 2 is good, it is not as rapid as the progress that pupils make in writing and mathematics. Outcomes at key stage 1 are improving quickly. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics is now above the national average. However, the proportion of children reaching the higher standards in all of these subjects is

below the national average. You also acknowledge that disadvantaged pupils do not perform as well at key stage 1 as they do at key stage 2.

Your effective and strong leadership is highly valued by staff. Your staff are a close-knit team and hold you in high regard. They are very proud of their school. Staff told me that you monitor the quality of their teaching with an eagle-eye. They really do appreciate the helpful and constructive feedback you give them to help them improve their practice. They also confirmed that any actions you set them to develop their teaching skills are diligently followed up. Good levels of support are given, by yourself and your staff, to those who are new to teaching.

Your local authority adviser is equally resounding in her praise of you and your school. She described you as being 'resilient with real ambition and leading the school on a path towards excellence'.

Pupils are delightful and a credit to the school and their families. Overall, behaviour around the school is impeccable and pupils look really smart in their school uniform, which they wear with pride. Relationships at all levels are respectful.

Many pupils were keen to speak to me. They talked avidly about their 'kind and supportive teachers'. I was really impressed by how well pupils knew their targets and how keen they were to achieve them. They also told me how teachers' marking helps them improve their work. Pupils talked to me in depth about their learning in subjects such as science, history and geography. Outdoor learning is particularly popular with all pupils. They relish the wonderful opportunities they have to make dens, boats and volcanoes from the natural materials found in the nearby woodland area. Pupils appreciate the wide range of clubs that are available after school for them to enjoy. It is also very clear to me that pupils really do have a voice in your school and contribute to decision-making, for example as elected members of the school council.

No one can doubt the governors' commitment to the school. They are regular visitors and are proud of the school's achievements. They have a clear vision for the school and a good knowledge about the progress that different groups of pupils are making. Safeguarding duties are taken seriously. Governors act as a critical friend, offering good levels of support and challenge in equal measure.

From our discussions, you recognise that roles of middle leaders of subjects such as science, history and geography are not fully embedded. You also acknowledge that some refinements need to be made to the school improvement plan.

You have addressed most of the areas for improvement set at the last inspection. Pupils now have many more opportunities to use information and communication technology to support their learning and development. Levels of parental engagement have increased. Parents are given regular and detailed information about their children's progress and attainment. Workshops on subjects such as phonics, reading and mathematics also equip parents with the knowledge and skills to help them develop their children's learning at home. Inspection evidence shows that most parents are positive about all aspects of the school's work.

Safeguarding is effective.

High priority is put on keeping pupils safe. Parents and staff are united in their view that pupils are safe at your school. Visitors' credentials are closely checked and written information on safeguarding procedures is given to all visitors to read and sign before they are admitted into the building. All staff and governors have completed relevant safeguarding training including on the 'Prevent' duty. Your staff have all read part one of 'Keeping children safe in education'. As a result, they have a good awareness of safeguarding procedures and talk with confidence about extremism and radicalisation. Those responsible for taking a lead role in safeguarding and recruitment have also completed appropriate training. There are comprehensive procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff. All safeguarding documentation examined during the inspection contained all the required detail. The single central record is compliant.

Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They are confident to discuss any worries or concerns with their teachers. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying, including issues around e-safety. They emphatically told me that bullying is rare, typically describing it as 'unacceptable'.

Inspection findings

- Ensuring that pupils attend school on a regular basis is one of your school's key priorities. Almost all pupils are of Asian or Pakistani heritage and many take extended holidays. Consequently, making sure that pupils attend school regularly is a challenge which you do not shy away from and have successfully overcome. Current attendance figures are in line with the national average. You ensure that parents are made aware of the impact that non-attendance has on their children's progress and achievement. Attendance figures feature prominently in monthly newsletters and weekly on the school's website. There are a wide variety of exciting rewards and incentives in place to celebrate good attendance. Any unexplained absences are swiftly followed up.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average at key stage 1. In addition, although the progress pupils make at key stage 2 in reading is good, it lags behind that in writing and mathematics. The wheels have already been set in motion to address these issues. The most able pupils now have access to more demanding texts. A reading club has been set up to provide parents with targeted support to develop their children's reading skills. The learning environment has been enhanced to ensure that reading has a higher profile around the school. Pupils at key stage 1 are being provided with more opportunities to write at length and across non-core subjects such as history and geography. Planning has been revised and is now more specific with regard to the writing skills that need to be taught to meet the needs of individual pupils, particularly the most able. Finally, in Year 2 pupils are streamed for writing. This ensures that those who learn more quickly are provided with activities which encourage them to think deeper and harder. Staff have had training in mathematics to enable them to challenge the most able pupils, specifically at key stage 1.
- Work in pupils' books shows that current pupils are making good progress in key stage 1 in writing and mathematics. We both agree, however, that at times worksheets with

small boxes prevent the most able pupils writing at length and in greater depth. You recognise that this good progress in both these subjects needs to be sustained to the end of the academic year and over time.

- I listened to pupils read from both key stages 1 and 2. Most read with flair and expression. Younger pupils are able to talk about the plot and their comprehension skills are good. Older pupils talked in depth about the type of books they like to read and their favourite authors. Pupils found their reading books challenging. We both agree, however, that better use could be made of the school library to foster pupils' love of reading.
- You and your staff have crafted a skills-based and balanced curriculum which ignites pupils' passion for learning. Subjects are taught discretely or through topics. The curriculum is further enriched by a wide range of trips which broaden children's experiences. Current pupils are making good progress in subjects such as science, history and geography. However, you acknowledge that the roles of the leaders of these subjects need to be developed further. For example, you do not yet expect them to monitor the quality of teaching in their area of responsibility or track pupils' progress as they move through the school.
- Your self-evaluation is honest, accurate and insightful. Priorities for development are clearly set out in your school development plan. However, some of the targets set are not sharp enough or measurable. This makes it more difficult for senior leaders and governors to track, with rigour, the progress that the school is making towards achieving these goals.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils in key stage 1, particularly those who are disadvantaged, reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of this academic year and that this is sustained over time
- progress in reading at key stage 2 is improved further
- the roles of middle leaders are further developed so that they have a greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment
- targets in the school development plan are sharp and measurable to allow the school to monitor closely the progress it is making toward achieving its goals.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I also had discussions with staff and pupils to seek their views of the school. Accompanied by you, I observed the learning that was taking place in key stage 1. Together, we looked at examples of pupils' work and I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I listened to pupils read. I reviewed a range of documentation including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and assessment records. Account was also taken the school's most recent survey to parents and of the 16 responses to the parental online Ofsted questionnaire.