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Mrs Helen Warburton
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Dear Mrs Warburton

Short inspection of North Walkden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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. This is a pleasing achievement considering the number of changes to staffing which have taken place. You have managed this situation well with your relentless focus to maintain the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, your new system to regularly check on pupils' progress is thorough and informative. This allows teachers to quickly assess where pupils are not making strong progress and to take action. Your focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is paying dividends, as noted by the good progress of current pupils and the quality of learning in their books. Recent appointments of senior leaders have strengthened your team. You work closely with the school improvement officer from the local authority who provides effective support. The school is well placed for further improvement.

All staff share your high expectations for pupils' behaviour. This results in North Walkden being a welcoming and calm school where pupils and staff are proud to attend. In classrooms and in all areas of the school, pupils' behaviour is consistently positive. Pupils have pleasing attitudes to learning and enjoy playing with their friends at breaktime. Pupils say that other pupils usually behave well and that bullying is rare. Any incidents of bullying are quickly resolved. Pupils contribute to a bright and meaningful learning environment which celebrates pupils' work and achievements.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement noted in the previous inspection report.

Leaders were asked to accelerate pupils' progress and attainment. This has happened, particularly in early years and in key stage 1. For example, to improve pupils' progress and attainment in writing, you have refreshed your approach to the teaching of this subject. High-quality texts are used in the teaching of writing. There is a systematic build-up to pupils completing a final piece of writing, normally over a two-week period. As part of this process, pupils have ample opportunities to talk about their writing and to share and explore ideas before they put pen to paper.

You have improved the management role of subject leaders. They are now routinely involved in leading their subjects. For example, they complete regular monitoring activities. These involve reviewing the teaching of their subjects in different classes and scrutinising the quality of pupils' work in books. Consequently, subject leaders hold an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses across the school and take appropriate action to make improvements. For example, to strengthen the quality of teaching in reading, leaders rearranged the morning timetable to ensure that there was enough time for reading to be taught daily in every class. Pupils' reading skills are improving as a result.

You are working hard to raise the aspirations of pupils and their families. Your school motto, 'Reach for the stars', represents the school's core values well. Pupils have opportunities to expand their horizons. For example, you organise a careers week where local people come in to speak to pupils about their future careers. Sports people come into school to talk to pupils about their success and to provide pupils with the aspiration and motivation to succeed in life. Pupils also have opportunities to engage with other cultures and religions. For example, they complete studies about other countries and learn about different faiths. They have also studied the plight of refugees and have taken part in African dance.

Although the school has many strengths, we discussed some areas where further work is needed. Boys are not making the progress you would like them to, particularly in reading and writing in key stage 2. Although improving, too many pupils still do not attend school regularly enough.

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and are of high quality. These show that where there are concerns about the safety of a pupil, actions are taken quickly and any risks are minimised. Outside agencies become involved in cases where necessary and your children and family support worker maintains close contact with families in these cases. The record of checks taken on staff before they work with pupils is comprehensive and clear. Adults do not work directly with pupils until appropriate clearances have been confirmed.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. For example, an annual safeguarding audit is completed by the safeguarding leader and the safeguarding governor. This ensures that leaders remain up to date with any changes to legislation or guidance. Safeguarding training for all staff in the school is completed regularly and is over and above what is expected. As a result, staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and are alert to any signs of abuse. Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations. These include when crossing the road, when approaching animals and when they are close to water. Older children are taught about the dangers of online grooming and of sexual exploitation. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. This is a view shared by all parents spoken to and of all staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection findings

- In our initial meeting, we discussed and agreed a number of key lines of enquiry which we followed throughout the inspection. The first key line of enquiry was to establish the quality of provision in early years. The early years provision is a key strength of your school. Leaders and teachers have created a stimulating and engaging learning environment both inside and outside the Nursery and Reception classrooms. Children have ample access to meaningful and purposeful learning which allows them to persevere with their learning to achieve success. Teachers use ongoing assessment of children's learning well to see where any gaps in learning remain and take appropriate action to improve. For example, on our joint observation in early years, we saw some focused teaching in mathematics for a group of boys which was planned to secure their knowledge of numbers to 20. Teachers and other staff are ambitious for children and have high expectations for them. This results in children having highly positive attitudes to learning and in them making strong progress. Work in children's writing books shows impressive progress over time. Children start at your school with skills and knowledge that are below those typically expected for their age. By the time they leave Reception, the vast majority of children achieve a good level of development and are well prepared for their time in Year 1.
- Our next focus was to consider the strength of your work to improve pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2. This is because pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2 was below the national average in 2016 and 2017. The development of pupils' reading skills is a priority in your improvement plan. Leaders and staff have worked hard to develop a love of reading across the school. For example, reading areas have been established in all classrooms to encourage pupils to engage with literature. Teachers regularly read to pupils at the end of each day and this introduces pupils to a range of different authors. You have altered the teaching timetable to accommodate a daily reading lesson which allows teachers and other staff to develop pupils' reading skills. Pupils also have opportunities to read for pleasure in these sessions. They also complete book reviews so teachers can see what they liked or disliked about a particular novel and whether they would recommend the book to others. Teachers provide an imaginative range of books, and pupils, including boys, say that they are eager to select books from this variety. Your actions are having a positive impact. Records show that pupils'

achievement in reading across the school is improving and more pupils achieve the higher standards in reading in key stage 2. However, in some year groups, boys are not achieving as well as they could.

- The next key line of enquiry related to boys' progress in writing in key stage 2. This is because in 2017, girls' progress was much stronger than boys' progress in writing by the time pupils left the school. You have completely refreshed the teaching of writing. The subject leader for English reviewed the different genres of writing which were taught in each year. She has ensured that there is a suitable range of genres which appeal to boys as well as girls. Boys are more interested in writing as a result. The subject leader has also reviewed the texts which pupils study to ensure that there is a suitable balance between fiction and non-fiction. The boys spoken to have an impressive grip on the technical aspects of writing, such as the use of grammar. Although your assessment information and the progress seen in boys' writing books show improvement, boys do not always transfer their strength in grammar to their independent writing. In some classes, boys are achieving as well as girls in their writing, including at the higher standard, but this is not consistent across all classes.
- The final key line of enquiry was to evaluate your progress in ensuring that pupils attend school more regularly. This is because pupils' attendance has been in the bottom 10% of schools nationally in the last three years. In addition, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from school in 2016 was above the national average and worsened in 2017. You are well aware of this area for improvement. This is an aspect which features prominently in your improvement plan and you are taking strong action to remedy this concern. Pupils who attend regularly receive rewards for 100% attendance. You have a clear policy which shares the importance of regular attendance with parents and carers. Parents are aware that any unauthorised absence, such as families taking holidays in term time, will be dealt with via the policy, often with the issuing of fixed-penalty notices. Your children and family support worker supports families who struggle to ensure that their children attend school every day. You respond quickly when pupils are absent and have exhausted all options to ensure that pupils attend as often as possible. Your actions are making a difference. The number of pupils who are classed as persistently absent this year has reduced dramatically. In addition, pupils' overall attendance has improved since 2017, but remains below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop a love of reading for boys so that boys' achievement in reading is consistently strong, particularly in key stage 2
- boys have regular opportunities to apply their knowledge of grammar to independent writing activities
- they persevere with the work to reduce pupils' absence so that more pupils enjoy the benefits of school more often.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the family support worker, the subject leader for English and the business manager. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body and the school improvement adviser. I spoke with four parents. There were not enough responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for me to complete an analysis of parents' views, but I did take into account the school's recent analysis of 80 parent questionnaires. I also considered four written responses from parents. I visited the early years classes and three of the key stage 2 classes with you to observe and engage with pupils about their learning. I met with pupils informally at breaktime to discuss their views of the school.

I considered a wide range of documentation relating to your self-evaluation, attendance information, records from school improvement adviser visits, and documentation on assessment and safeguarding.