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Mrs Samantha Crawforth  
Headteacher  
Blackshaw Moor CofE (VC) First School  
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Dear Mrs Crawforth

### **Short inspection of Blackshaw Moor CofE (VC) First School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment last year, you have set about strengthening your team and introducing many new systems in order to raise standards for all groups of pupils. This has had a significant improvement on outcomes, as demonstrated by the improved results in 2018. Staff I spoke to agree unanimously that the school is making marked improvement, because of all the support and training that you have given them. You have raised expectations of pupils' achievements and parents and carers are delighted with the progress that their children are making.

You established a new set of school values, which reflect the Christian ethos of the school. Caring, truthfulness and respect permeate all aspects of school life and pupils are aware of respecting all members of the school community. This has contributed to the consistently good behaviour pupils demonstrate at all times. You have successfully established closer links with the community. Both parents and staff are confident in your leadership, because you always take time to listen to their concerns.

You work well with the newly appointed chair of the governing body and the governors are regular visitors to the school. This enables them to gain an independent view of the school. Governors are fully committed to improving the school by working effectively with you. They know the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors are aware of the strategies that you are

implementing to improve attainment, especially for pupils' writing, presentation and spelling in Years 3 and 4.

You are committed to reducing teachers' workload and during the inspection we discussed the need for your tracking of pupils' progress to be less cumbersome. At present it is difficult for you to access the information about the progress of different groups of pupils from their starting points.

Parents hold the school in high esteem. Many of them travel long distances to ensure that their children attend your school. Your school motto, 'Working together in God's love for the benefit of all', is evident in many aspects of school life. For example, staff plan together to ensure continuity and progression for pupils' learning. In many lessons, pupils help one another to finish their work.

You have won the respect of the whole school. Staff are approachable, supportive and caring. One parent summed up the view of others, describing the school as 'home from home, due to the exceptional care and nurture that all children receive'.

Pupils enjoy school and say that learning is hard but very enjoyable. From the moment children enter the early years foundation stage of learning they are eager to explore the exciting activities that teachers have set up. You have improved resources for outdoor provision and all groups of children have access to well-planned activities outdoors. They rapidly acquire basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics through well-thought-out play activities and are well prepared for work in Year 1.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed. You have worked relentlessly with teachers and support staff at improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils in writing. Current data shows that these pupils reached high standards in Year 2. However, there is still some more work to be done in ensuring that more pupils make consistently good progress in Years 3 and 4. You have introduced 'catch up' programmes for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, to ensure that small sequential steps in learning are taught, assessed and revisited. This thorough approach is impacting positively on the secure progress that these pupils make.

You have ensured that teachers and teaching assistants offer a variety of interventions for pupils who have not quite grasped concepts in reading and in mathematics previously taught in class. Interventions are now analysed to evaluate their effectiveness. If a particular approach is not working you immediately try something different. You evaluate thoroughly the support offered for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. You ensure that they do not spend too long on going over learning that they have already mastered. You keep a close eye on ensuring that teachers and support staff evaluate the impact of their teaching on the progress that pupils make. Since the last inspection, you and your governors have ensured that all checks on suitability of adults to work with children are recorded correctly.

## **Safeguarding is effective**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You rightly place a high priority on keeping children safe and this permeates across your school community, creating a culture of vigilance. Pupils that I spoke to, as well parents, said that the school is a safe place.

The excellent relationships between the pupils and staff result in pupils trusting adults and knowing that support is always at hand should they need it. Pupils spoke at great length about how they have been helped to use the internet safely. They know what to do if they should come across any inappropriate material.

Governors have recently increased internet security with even stronger firewalls. You have ensured that pupils are familiar with risks in the locality. Pupils were eager to tell me about the work that they had undertaken on not talking to strangers, keeping safe in the local area and being aware of road safety.

Governors and leaders understand their statutory responsibilities. They make sure that staff receive regular training to help them implement safeguarding procedures effectively. They check the school's systems for recording information about staff to ensure that all checks have been carried out correctly.

Every staff meeting has a safeguarding item on the agenda and staff have read and understood the latest information pertaining to keeping children safe in school. Adults are in no doubt as to how to report any concerns they might have about pupils. Your recording systems are well maintained and show detailed chronology of events and work completed with outside agencies. Your decisions are informed by the best interests of the child.

You provide very useful information for parents about their children's safety and they easily access all documentation on the website.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry, which we followed during the inspection.
- Since your appointment, you and your staff have thought about the various barriers to learning that your pupils have and have devised a curriculum to meet their needs and interests. Boys in Years 1 and 2 are hooked on learning the minute they walk through the door. For example, the topic of 'Superheroes' enables them to look at properties of materials in designing clothes that superheroes might wear. Visits to Sudbury Hall Museum of Childhood have enabled boys to write at length about differences in toys from the past and now.
- Classrooms are designed in a way where boys can explore a range of artefacts and write about them. The curriculum covers all subjects and is enriched with visitors, such as motivational speakers who encourage pupils

to 'follow their dreams' and reach high standards.

- In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the national standard in writing in the national assessment tests at the end of Year 2 was slightly below that of reading and mathematics. However, attainment in writing had improved from the previous year, with a greater proportion of boys working in greater depth.
- Your insistence on developing speaking skills has enabled boys to be highly enthused about writing poetry. They eagerly recite the poem of 'Little Rabbit Foo Foo' and have written exciting lullabies to send dragons to sleep. You are fully aware that writing is still an area to be further developed across the school. You have rightly implemented a scheme that teaches pupils how to organise their ideas in a logical way. This is having a good impact on current progress of all groups of pupils. In Year 4 pupils are catching up and attaining age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In order to ensure that standards are improving in Years 3 and 4 you have made changes to the continuity of teaching. Teachers are now teaching their classes instead of discrete subjects. Their planning together has ensured that there is progression from one year group to the next. Currently, pupils are making improved progress in Years 3 and 4 but there are still issues to be addressed in their spelling, writing and presentation of work, especially for boys. Together with the literacy coordinator, you have trained teachers and support staff on implementing a handwriting and spelling scheme.
- Pupils are given more opportunities to write in different subjects. Classroom displays demonstrate that teachers focus on helping pupils use a wide range of adjectives in their writing. The recent introduction of interventions based upon teaching correct clusters of spellings, ably run by support staff, is having a positive impact on improving boys' attainment in writing.
- You place a great emphasis on the teaching of phonics. From early years, children are progressing securely through the phonics scheme. You introduced more structure to the teaching of phonics, trained staff to deliver high-quality lessons and checked progress regularly. Teachers now use a variety of methods to engage pupils, from laughing at nonsense words to using spellings in dictations and reading key words scattered around the hall floor. This is having a positive impact on acquiring knowledge of the sounds that letters make. The subsequent impact of your leadership of the curriculum has been that Year 1 pupils this year did very well in the phonics screening check, with the proportion reaching the expected standard being above national expectations.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve attainment in writing, spelling and presentation for all groups of pupils, especially boys in Years 3 and 4
- refine the current tracking systems to enable leaders to identify the progress different groups of pupils make over time across each key stage.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Bogusia Matusiak-Varley  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you to discuss the school's self-evaluation and pupils' progress and improvement since the last inspection. Together, we undertook a learning walk through key stages 1 and 2. We observed teaching and learning in classrooms. I looked at a range of pupils' work in books and I listened to three pupils read. I talked to them about the reading habits, their experience of school life and how safe they feel. I had a telephone conversation with the newly appointed chair of the governing body and with the local authority school improvement partner. I looked at a range of written evidence, including the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding. I spoke to five parents, as there were too few parents that responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I spoke to members of staff to seek their views on the school.