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Mr Adam Laskey
Executive Headteacher
St Thomas' Moorside CofE (VA) Primary School
Coleridge Road
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Dear Mr Laskey

No formal designation inspection of St Thomas' Moorside CofE (VA) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the outcomes for pupils at the school.

Evidence

During my visit I met with you, the head of school, other school leaders and members of the teaching staff. I met five governors including the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I spoke to seven parents at the start of the school day. I chatted to a small group of pupils to gain their views on teaching, learning and behaviour. You and I visited every classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. Our visits concentrated on pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics.

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I also considered records of pupils' attendance, your improvement plans and minutes from governing body meetings. I evaluated your most recent information on pupils' outcomes, including the 2017 unvalidated results.

The school was judged outstanding at its previous inspection. Inspection evidence from this visit confirms that standards are strong and therefore the school is still outstanding.

Context

St Thomas' Moorside is one of two schools that were federated to form The Dove-Shell Federation in 2015. You are the executive headteacher of the two schools. On a day-to-day basis a head of school runs St Thomas' Moorside. The school is a smaller-than-average primary school. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are fewer pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who speak English as an additional language than found nationally. The proportion of pupils who have support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average but the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above it. More pupils leave or join the school at different times of the year than found in other schools across the country, although this is decreasing. There are twice as many pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium funding than the national average.

Inspection findings

This monitoring inspection was in response to falling standards and weaker progress, particularly in reading and mathematics, at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. I also explored the reasons why the proportion of children with a good level of development is below that of children of a similar age nationally.

Attainment and progress in reading and mathematics dipped considerably for Year 6 pupils in 2016 compared with outcomes at the time of the last inspection in 2015. By taking decisive action, you have ensured that attainment and progress improved substantially in 2017 for these two subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving the levels of attainment expected for their age was just above that seen nationally for mathematics and above average in writing. In reading, attainment is close to that seen nationally and represents a marked improvement compared to reading outcomes the year before.

Your own assessment information confirms that you have halted the decline in standards. Pupils benefit from the reorganised teaching throughout key stage 2 and much tighter, regular checks on their progress during the year. This is having a positive effect on all pupils but particularly in helping the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as possible. As a result, the difference between this group of pupils and their peers is diminishing. You are in a strong position to build on the excellent progress that pupils make by the end of key stage 1 by continuing to accelerate the progress and attainment of pupils throughout key stage 2.

You know your school and pupils extremely well. Our visits to classrooms held no surprises because you keep a close watch on teaching and the difference this makes to pupils' progress. Consequently, your decision to move teachers around to strengthen key stage 2 and support pupils new to key stage 1 ensures that pupils are confident learners. As a pupil remarked, 'My teacher makes me feel comfortable to learn.' Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations. They and teaching assistants use questions highly effectively to develop pupils' learning. Pupils' learning is improving because teachers demand the best from them. In turn, pupils rise to this and relish the challenges they are set. They really enjoy the chances they get to think about their learning and apply it to different situations. Teachers introduce new work carefully and provide many helpful examples so that pupils know how to set about their tasks. Ample opportunities to talk and share ideas mean pupils are happy and eager to learn. The quality of work seen in pupils' books demonstrates accelerated progress and confirms that concerted action from your leadership team is leading to strong improvement.

In 2016, leaders identified reading as a concern due to a dip in standards and progress made by pupils across key stage 2. Swift action by you and your head of school has resulted in rapidly improving standards. Resources were targeted accurately and the governing body prioritised funding to improve the school's library, instilling a love of reading among pupils. The changes you have made to the way reading is taught have ignited pupils' enthusiasm for reading and offered them extended opportunities to improve their reading skills as well as their levels of enjoyment. As pupils in Year 6 said, 'We have lots of cool books to read, it makes reading so much more fun.' However, you are aware that some pupils do not always have a chance to read regularly at home. Teachers make sure that if this is the case, an adult in the school will read with them often. Leaders have increased their focus on monitoring reading and holding teachers to account for continued improvements in reading standards.

In 2016, too few pupils at the end of key stage 2 made the progress expected of them and outcomes were much lower than the national average. Leaders took immediate action and secured rapid improvements, upon which you are continuing to build. First, you used assessment to identify quickly the gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers adopted a new whole-school approach to teaching mathematical skills, which gives pupils lots of opportunities to build on and practise their new skills. Pupils are also given regular chances to extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts. As a result, pupils' confidence in mathematics has greatly improved. You recognise the need to continue to build this confidence to ensure that more pupils reach the higher standards.

The majority of your pupils are eligible for the pupil premium funding. You and your inclusion team work extremely hard to support disadvantaged pupils and ensure that barriers to learning are reduced as much as possible. This ensures that these pupils have access to all the learning offered and achieve all that they are capable

of. For example, to make sure that pupils have a nutritious start to the day, you have developed breakfast club as a welcoming communal event, open to all pupils and their parents. Nearly half the pupils in the school regularly attend. Enticingly, as well as the usual cereal and toast options, you offer eggs, sausages and bacon. This club is a thriving, friendly and social time when pupils and their parents can sit, talk and eat.

Your inclusion team knows pupils and families extremely well and has developed strong, trusting relationships. You are very vigilant in meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils and their families and are quick to respond when a pupil or family needs help and assistance. Where safeguarding issues arise you are swift and persistent in ensuring that a pupil's safety and welfare are paramount.

Your work to raise attendance has been impressive. As a result, attendance has improved and is now above that of other schools nationally. You have been particularly successful in reducing the number of pupils who regularly miss school. In particular, disadvantaged pupils now attend school more frequently than they did in the past. You know there is still more to do to ensure that all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, come to school every day and so benefit from the high-quality learning experiences that the school offers them.

Many children that enter the early years do so with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age, and a few are well below. Their skills are particularly low in communication and in aspects of personal and physical development. The excellent-quality learning and experiences offered to children ensure that they catch up as much as possible and make strong progress from their starting points. Your focus on the skills that these children need to be able to start to read, write and be aware of number is carefully planned and matched to each individual child's learning needs. This gives children the best possible chance to establish firm foundations for learning and go on to be well prepared for their transition into Year 1. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is improving year on year and is ever closer to the national average. Your early years team offers a thorough grounding to children in Nursery and Reception, which means that by the end of Year 1 a higher-than-average proportion of pupils meet the national standards for phonics and by the end of Year 2 the vast majority of pupils have caught up with pupils nationally.

Your pupils are a credit to you. They are proud of their school and eager to do their best. They enjoy their lessons because adults make them interesting and fun. They feel safe and know that if there is any name-calling or unkindness adults care for them and will sort things out quickly. Parents are similarly positive about school. All those who spoke to me said they felt that their children are happy and safe. A number also remarked that staff often go 'above and beyond' in their care and support for children and families.

The leadership of the school is first rate. Pupils are making much stronger progress

than they did last year because of the action you and your head of school have taken. Your belief in sharing leadership and accountability across staff has resulted in a dedicated and motivated team that is focused on achieving the very best for pupils. Governors play their part in supporting you and other leaders in bringing about change and improvement. They challenge leaders regularly to ensure that any funding for initiatives has the desired effect. Governors have a good understanding of the use of the pupil premium funding and its impact because of detailed reporting by the school's leaders. They take very seriously their responsibility to ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive.

Your priorities to bring about further change are just right. Your success in raising pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics is a clear sign that you, the governors and your teaching staff have the skills, determination and capacity to bring about further improvement.

External support

The local authority generally provides light-touch support to the school. Nevertheless, local authority officers do keep an eye on the school and were quick to provide support when key-stage-2 standards dropped in 2016. You have benefited from assistance from the local authority in evaluating the changes and improvements you have recently made. You select external support carefully to make sure it meets the needs of the school. The work of external consultants has helped you push up pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to raise achievement in reading and mathematics across key stage 2, particularly ensuring that as many pupils as possible reach higher standards.
- Continue to ensure that as many pupils as possible attend school every day so that they benefit from every chance to achieve all that they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector