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Miss Vicky Lunniss
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Dear Miss Lunniss

Short inspection of Preston Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Pupils at Preston Primary School are happy, safe and full of praise for the work staff do to encourage them to do their best. Pupils describe their time at the school as 'awesome', 'fantastic' and 'fun' because 'teachers take care of us and want us to do well'. Year 6 pupils said 'We will be sad to leave to go to secondary school.' A parent captured the views of many, describing the school as 'unique in its wonderfulness'.

Since your appointment in September 2015, you have provided strong direction and leadership for the school. Prior to your appointment, there was a short period of temporary leadership following the retirement of the previous headteacher. This was because governors were resolute about taking the necessary time to recruit the right person. Once in position, you wasted no time in continuing to improve school standards. You know the school well because of the regular, rigorous monitoring you undertake. You use this knowledge effectively to plan the right actions to bring about further improvement. You have recruited well to the post of assistant headteacher and, alongside your staff and governors, you have tenaciously acted upon the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection.

Pupils are developing positive attitudes towards their learning and demonstrate good habits that will support their work in the future. Pupils use the 'learning power superheroes' to further develop themselves so they achieve the best that they can.

While pupils take on board the guidance and support of all adults in the school, pupils are also independently able to make decisions about what they want, and need to do, next. For example, one Year 6 pupil said, 'I have my SATs in May and so when I get home I read lots to help me learn more about what I have done in school.' When asked if that was homework, the pupil responded, saying, 'No, it's because I want to do well so I am ready for my secondary school.' Parents are equally positive about the educational experiences their children receive. One parent said, 'A real strength is how engaged in learning the children are.'

Governors contribute a broad set of skills to Preston Primary School. They share your vision and determination for the school to be the best. Governors offer significant support and challenge to ensure that they have a role in this being realised. Governors fully understand the need to seek evidence to support what is reported to them by leaders. They are reflective and realistic about their own work. This understanding is helping them to significantly improve their effectiveness in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. Governors regularly visit the school, assuring themselves that the school improvement plan priorities are focused upon and evaluating the impact the work has on pupil achievement.

Parents are complimentary about your work in improving the school since you started. One parent said: 'There has been a large number of very positive changes. The school is being really well led by the headteacher who is highly professional, hard-working, motivated and dedicated.' Another parent said:

> 'Preston is a superb school with its caring and encouraging atmosphere and children are making excellent progress both academically and socially. We feel confident our children will leave Preston well-rounded young people who have been helped to develop in all areas by the staff and the excellent school atmosphere.'

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are of a high quality.

Staff and governors are fully trained, well informed and up to date with the most recent guidance and information about safeguarding and child protection. This ensures that all adults are equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to ensure that pupils are kept safe and well cared for. Records, including checks on staff suitability, are detailed and well maintained. You take decisive, swift action, and work proactively with families and external agencies to protect all pupils.

Teachers support pupils effectively to understand the benefits and potential risks online. You ensure that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection, and that pupils are kept safe through effective online safety procedures. For example, you routinely request a log of all internet access so that you can check it is being safely and appropriately used. As a result, pupils know how to use the internet and technology responsibly, both inside and outside of school.

Pupils feel well looked after at school. They have a secure understanding of the school's behaviour management system, understand the 'traffic light' consequences and feel proud when they receive a 'golden ticket'. Pupils say that inappropriate behaviour is rare, there is very little distraction when they are working and they feel safe during breaktimes. Pupils report feeling able to confide in all adults if they have a concern or worry.

Parents believe that their children are safe and cared for at school. Parents responding to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and the free-text service confirm that their children feel safe and are happy going to school. One parent captured the similar views of other parents, saying, 'there is a safe, caring, nurturing ethos at the school and children enjoy coming to school every day.'

Inspection findings

- To decide whether the school was still good, I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection. Three of the key lines of enquiry were linked to finding out how well the school had addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- The first was looking at the learning environment, inside and outside, in early years. You and your team, with effective support from the local authority, have developed this aspect considerably since the previous inspection. There are now many more purposeful activities for children to access that enable them to develop their reading, writing and mathematics skills. However, evaluating all the evidence, you agreed that the children are capable of achieving more. You identify that there is further work to be done in early years to ensure that adults make the most of all the opportunities to support, guide and develop children further, so that they make better progress from their starting points.
- The second line of enquiry was focusing on writing. I found a wide range of evidence that demonstrates pupils are given opportunities to write at length for a range of purposes and audiences. Work in pupils' books is of high quality and shows good progress over time, clearly reflecting the breadth of the curriculum on offer. For example, in religious education, pupils produced extended writing comparing two different religions. In history, they produced writing detailing the ancient Mayan civilisation and, in science, pupils wrote independently to complete written predictions and explanations of fair testing. Additionally, your focus on improving pupils' spelling and the application of grammar and punctuation skills to their writing is yielding the good results evident in pupils' writing in all year groups.
- The third area of focus from the previous inspection was how effective work has been to develop and improve the teaching and learning of mathematics. You have successfully implemented a 'mastery' approach that is securing better progress and helping teachers refine their planning to meet the needs of all pupils. There is a range of evidence to demonstrate that when mathematical concepts are taught, teachers are starting to successfully deepen pupils' thinking by posing effective questions, such as 'can you prove…' and 'convince me that…'.

- An additional line of enquiry during the inspection was evaluating the extent to which most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are being challenged to achieve more. While the school has implemented the 'mild, medium and spicy' challenges to further extend pupils' knowledge and understanding, you rightly acknowledge that the most able pupils can still be extended further to do better and achieve the higher standard. Pupils themselves identify this and say that they want harder work to make sure they do better. For example, one pupil said: 'I enjoy the challenges and they help me to think, but I think they need to be harder because often I can do the 'spicy' challenge really quickly and it's supposed to make me think more.'
- Another key line of enquiry was to check how teachers are ensuring that all abilities of pupils are being successfully met in the mixed-aged classes. I took note of the school's current assessment information and looked in many pupils' books to see if there were differences in the work being set within classes.
- Teachers are very clear about your expectations and understand that they are accountable for the progress of pupils in their class. You hold teachers to account at regular pupil progress meetings. These show that teachers do know their pupils and they do set work that is both age-appropriate and meets their specific needs. As a result, more pupils are making consistently good progress from their various starting points, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils you identify as needing to catch up.
- In order to check the extent of the progress pupils make over time in mixed-aged classes, I looked at how leaders and teachers use the school's chosen assessment system to increase the expectations of all pupils. Since the national changes in assessment, you have worked with staff to find a system that works effectively for your pupils' needs. The 'learning ladders' are now embedded and being used consistently across the school in reading, writing and mathematics by all teachers. This further helps teachers to plan and teach activities that meet the various needs of mixed-age group classes.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how leaders ensure that pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, are supported to attend school regularly. The small numbers of pupils in these groups mean that each pupil represents a high percentage and, therefore, any analysis needs to take into account that the groups' attendance figures can fluctuate. Nevertheless, in both 2015 and 2016, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was in the bottom 10% nationally. Additionally, in 2016, the persistent absence of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was higher than the national average.
- You and the family support worker know your families well and work closely with these pupils to support them as required. Your actions are making a positive difference. You have clarified expectations for attendance and are very rigorous in checking the authenticity of reasons for absence. You work conscientiously to ensure that parents and pupils understand the significance of good attendance and punctuality. Consequently, pupils' attendance and punctuality have

improved. The school's most up-to-date attendance and persistent absence information is currently more positive than in 2016.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are more routine opportunities taken in the early years to develop and extend children's knowledge, understanding and application of their skills, so that they achieve as well as they should
- the most able pupils, including the small number of most-able disadvantaged pupils, are challenged effectively and consistently, so that they continue to make rapid progress and attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 6.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your assistant headteacher and special needs coordinator. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection and the priorities leaders are focusing upon. I visited all classes with you and we looked at a range of pupils' work in English, mathematics and topic books. I also held discussions with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and talked informally to pupils and heard some pupils read. I held a telephone conversation with the school's local authority representative.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. I also checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and attendance information.

I also took into account the 27 responses to the online survey, Parent View, and considered the additional 28 free-text comments received from parents. I took into account 13 responses to the staff survey and 77 responses completed by pupils issued during the inspection.