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Mrs Julie Butcher
St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Butcher

Short inspection of St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 March 2013.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, your leadership team and members of the governing body spoke about the work that has taken place since the previous inspection to improve the quality of education that the school provides. You continue to ensure that pupils have access to the best teaching possible. You are well supported by your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders in your mission to achieve this. Under your guidance, your leadership team routinely checks the quality of teaching and learning across the school to ensure that pupils make good progress in their learning. You also ensure that staff make good use of support and training that are available to them to continuously improve teaching and learning.

Leaders and governors have a very clear and accurate picture of the strengths of the school and those areas which require further improvement. Your work with colleagues across a range of schools to develop the best strategies for pupils' resilience and self-belief is effective. You are adamant that such barriers to pupils' learning should be eradicated to enable pupils to achieve the very best outcomes possible. Your work with partner schools is not limited to developing pupils' social and emotional aspects of learning. Governors particularly value your collaborative work which affords teachers the opportunity to work with colleagues from different

schools. One such example is where teachers check with teachers in partner schools the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work. Teachers and leaders value these opportunities because they ensure that the school's assessment system is robust and reliable.

One way that you use the assessment information that you have about pupils is to support the most able pupils. Leaders and governors speak passionately about your work to ensure that the most able pupils achieve higher levels, especially in mathematics. You are proud of the work staff do to develop positive 'mind-sets' in pupils, especially boys. This raises pupils' expectations and aspirations. The most able pupils achieve well in mathematics. You also describe other successful initiatives to promote strong progress for the most able. These include workshops for parents and pupils to develop their mathematical understanding and a range of activities to motivate and inspire pupils to achieve the higher levels in mathematics. Pupils value these opportunities because they challenge them to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. During the inspection you recognised that there is still work to do to ensure that most-able pupils, especially the most able boys, achieve the highest standard at the end of each key stage.

Without doubt, St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School is a warm and inviting school, where leaders do not rest until they feel they have done the best for their pupils. You and your chair of the governing body recognise that this is the key to success for the school's pupils. Inclusivity is at the heart of your work. You are always willing to give pupils a second chance and as such you welcome pupils who have not thrived well in other schools and you help them to blossom. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also well supported because you use the funding provided for them with care and precision.

Parents also agree that the school is inclusive. Those who spoke to me during the inspection told me that the school is one where everyone is valued. Every pupil is known well and understood. Many parents said that they feel that staff always have time for them and 'go the extra mile' to support their children. They particularly value the care your staff show to their children. They also commented on how well their youngest children progress in the early years provision.

Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection are very positive about the school. They told me that their teachers 'connect' with them and that if they get stuck on any aspect of their work, their teachers make sure that they understand the topic or concept being studied. Pupils also value the range of clubs and activities that you offer. This includes lunchtime clubs and those after school because you ensure that all pupils can attend if they want. The findings of this inspection support these views.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and your records are detailed and of high quality. You, as the lead for safeguarding, show due diligence of care for pupils and their families. You liaise effectively with other agencies, including Lancashire social care, the police and health services where needed. You have used appropriate escalation to multi-agencies, for example, when required.

You, your staff and governors make it clear that pastoral support is a key priority. Pupils say that they feel very safe at school and that they feel confident that all pupils from different backgrounds, cultures or beliefs would be accepted by their peers. Pupils and parents say that bullying is rare and should it occur, it would get resolved quickly.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I initially looked at how effectively leaders have addressed areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. The focus of this was whether high-quality teaching ensures that most-able pupils reach the standards that they should. You and your leadership team review, monitor and evaluate the quality of provision for the most able throughout the year. The evidence you gather is convincing and supports your view that teaching has a positive impact on learning for the most able across the school. You rightly acknowledge, however, that there is still work to be done to ensure that the most able pupils achieve all they can, especially in test or formal assessment situations.
- The second area of focus during the inspection was the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve outcomes for middle-ability pupils. This is because national test results for key stage 2 pupils, including boys in 2016, show that pupils do not achieve as well as other groups of pupils in the school or those found nationally. You and other leaders have put appropriate support and tracking systems in place to support these pupils. It is clear that leaders' actions to address this issue are effective. This was confirmed by the local authority officer who acknowledged the strong improvements made. When we looked at quality of teaching to support learning for middle-ability pupils, coupled with pupils' work in their exercise books and the school's own data, it was clear that pupils are on track to achieve expected levels by the end of this academic year.
- The third area focused on the progress made by disadvantaged children in the early years. In 2016, those disadvantaged children who did not achieve a good level of development in the early years did not catch up by the time they reached the end of key stage 1. As a result, the progress they made was below national averages. The school has taken effective action to ensure that a high level of support is in place for these potentially vulnerable children so that they can catch up. You have effective tracking and support systems in place to ensure that these children make the same good rates of progress as their peers.

- The final area was to consider your work to reduce the variability of pupils' attendance and the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school. In 2016, attendance overall was in line with national averages but a relatively high proportion of pupils were persistently absent from school. Current attendance information confirms that, at this point in the year, attendance overall continues to be in line with the national average but persistent attendance is higher than the 2016 figure. You and other leaders described the wide range of strategies that you use to ensure that pupils attend school regularly, including picking up pupils from home when required. You employ and exhaust a wide range of strategies to improve attendance, many of which have been successful in improving individuals' attendance. There is, however, a small number of families who take their children out of school in term time on holiday. Governors agree that leaders must make reducing term-time absence a continued priority.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, including the most able boys, achieve the higher levels by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2, especially in mathematics
- they continue to improve pupils' rates of attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Cropper
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you, the deputy headteacher and two other members of the senior leadership team. I also met formally with nine pupils. In addition I held meetings with six governors, the local authority officer and the leader for behaviour and pastoral support. In total, I visited eight lessons with senior leaders to observe pupils' learning and to look at pupils' work in their books. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and their behaviour around the school. Furthermore, I took into account 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own surveys. In addition, I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation, the school development plan, the school's own information about pupils' progress, safeguarding records and policies,

the school's behaviour and bullying records, and the school's attendance reports. I also undertook a review of the school's website.