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Mr Graeme Dow
Headteacher
Anchorsholme Primary Academy
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Dear Mr Dow

Short inspection of Anchorsholme Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016 with Ofsted inspector Pritiben Patel, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher, you are engaged fully in the life of the school. This ranges from your daily greeting of pupils and families outdoors, to your contribution to the work of the school choir and your frequent visits to classrooms. You are developing a school that is unafraid to show that staff and leaders are caring and have a sense of humour. For example – as demonstrated by the school's popular online video – presenting staff in various festive costumes singing fun Christmas songs. Pupils know and respect you; and as one said to an inspector: 'We are very lucky to have such a good headteacher.'

You have created a calm, caring, family feeling in a large, busy primary school. This is helping younger pupils to feel settled, just as much as it is helping those in Year 6 to be ready for their move to secondary school. Pupils of different ages behave with confidence and responsibility as they move around the many corridors and classrooms.

This is a school where pupils are willing to learn and to play their part in school life. They are given many opportunities to contribute, grow and flourish. Before and after the main school day, a large number of pupils join extra sports and arts activities. They do so with gusto and almost skip to these additional, much-valued lessons.

At the last inspection, inspectors recommended that the school work to improve the quality of teaching so that pupils' progress in mathematics continues to accelerate. They also recommended that more pupils should reach levels above those expected for their age in both English and mathematics. You have responded well; improving staff training, refining arrangements to check the progress of individual pupils and increasing reviews and support for the work of teachers. You rightly continue to prioritise this work as you have identified that not all pupils achieve as well as others. Your actions to further reduce the gaps in attainment and progress between pupils across the school are clear and well considered.

Through your focus on developing the roles of other leaders, you are developing a school where each age group is valued. For example, the three Reception classes are working together as a successful department, as well as contributing well to the wider development of the school. Nevertheless, you recognise that teaching assistants across the school are not being given enough help to make a full contribution to the quality of teaching and learning.

The school makes excellent use of its website, blogs and newsletters to share information with parents. Many parents are fully supportive of the way the school works and what it is achieving. Parents told inspectors they are kept up to date about their child's progress. They say they are happy with the quality of care, learning and teaching. However, some parents feel their individual concerns about the school have not been addressed well by staff and leaders. Some parents are less satisfied with the way the school communicates with them on changes and improvements that affect their child.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place a huge emphasis upon the safety and safeguarding of pupils. When pupils arrive at school each morning, specific staff are placed purposefully at different entrances to the school. Staff watch closely for any changes in pupils' well-being and behaviour. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are present at the school gates to greet pupils and parents. At other busy times of the school day, staff and leaders are visibly present and making sure that pupils are safe. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in the school and enjoy attending. Their excellent awareness of online safety has developed through several school assemblies, as well as frequent discussions in lessons. Pupils also have a good understanding of fire safety. The leadership team makes sure that records relating to the suitability of staff and volunteers are detailed and of high quality. Visitors to the school are checked thoroughly. Staff with whom we spoke understand how to protect pupils from harm, including keeping them safe from developing extremist views. Staff safeguarding knowledge is developed well through regular training and checks of their understanding by leaders. Arrangements to protect pupils and work with outside agencies to ensure pupils' safety are clear and well understood.

Inspection findings

- Anchorsholme is not a school that stands still. For example, you have appointed a large number of new teachers in recent years. These staff are bringing extra vitality to the life of the school. Leaders' skilful support for new and recently qualified teachers is a now a strength.
- The expertise of senior and middle leaders is used increasingly well to help the school identify successes as well as areas for improvement. As a result, you have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths of the school. You know what remains to be achieved and how you will tackle each priority.
- Reviews of the quality of teaching are regular and thorough. Teachers are ably supported by leaders: the help provided is matched carefully to the needs of individual staff. You have taken many opportunities to help staff better understand what high-quality teaching looks like. The many staffing changes have been managed very well and the quality of teaching in the school remains good. This is making sure that most pupils continue to attain above the national average. You are challenging all staff to stretch the abilities of more-able pupils further.
- You have identified correctly that disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well as others, particularly in mathematics. Staff are taking clear steps to support these pupils' feelings and to improve pupils' skills and ability to learn. Teachers are reviewing the progress of disadvantaged pupils very closely. You recognise that it is too soon to see the full impact of this work but you are keeping a close eye upon the situation in order to ensure future improvements.
- The choir continues to be a unique strength of the school. Pupils' singing abilities are now so high that they are winning competitions beyond Blackpool. For example, Anchorsholme choir beat schools from across Lancashire to win the Last Choir Singing competition in 2015.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. You keenly promote attitudes and behaviour that support the school's 'Anchors statements' such as pupils being confident, and doing their best to achieve. Pupils experience a good range of opportunities to develop their respect for diversity. For example, pupils throughout the school are enjoying learning Mandarin, as well as being taught about the richness of Chinese culture. In 2015, members of your very active school council made an exciting visit to Downing Street and the Houses of Parliament. This deepened pupils' understanding of democracy. Pupils are also taught the importance of respecting the natural environment, such as through the recent and successful trip for Year 3 pupils to the forest at Brockhole in the Lake District.
- Across the school pupils enjoy a broad and varied curriculum. For example, all pupils in Year 6 have opportunities to benefit from photography lessons taught by the Chair of Governors. The resulting standard of photographs taken by pupils is high. The current school production of *Billy Elliot* is being given great realism by your loan of real police riot shields and helmets. This is giving pupils as much of an authentic, dramatic experience as possible.

- Teaching assistants are playing a valuable role within lessons and activities across the school, including with individual pupils. However, leaders do not give these staff the same high level of help and support as they give teachers. As a result, not all teaching assistants know precisely how they can improve their teaching.
- The work of the three Reception classes is a new strength of the school. These children are being given a valuable head start to their learning through a curriculum that is exciting, engaging and well considered. You have identified correctly that leadership of this part of the school is highly skilled, passionate and absolutely committed to high standards. Review and self-challenge on how to improve young children's education in the school is strong. For example, analysis of information about children's progress is detailed and used skilfully to improve teaching and learning. As a result, almost all Reception Year children in 2015 progressed well and moved to Year 1 ready to continue their learning.
- Since the previous inspection, you and governors have formally linked the school with Park Community Academy and with Devonshire Primary Academy. Together you are Blackpool Multi-Academy Trust. Among many benefits, staff are now developing their teaching skills by learning from a larger group of colleagues. Valuable extra support has also been established across the group of schools in support of pupils' welfare and individual needs. You have achieved these advantages while not losing the unique features and strengths of your own school.
- In June 2014, you appointed a new deputy headteacher. You are making extensive use of his expertise to help improve the school. For example, members of the governing body specifically acknowledge his work in helping them understand information about pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, governors challenge leaders well about pupils' learning.
- Recently, the governing body has recruited several new members including a new Chair of Governors. A clear new structure for the governing body has been introduced, working through two key committees. These changes have further enhanced the way the governors check, review and challenge the work of the school. Governors have a clear understanding of staff pay and performance as well as the difference being made to pupils' learning. Members of the governing body are meeting with individual staff in organised and purposeful ways to understand the work of the school. Nonetheless, the Chair is taking well-planned steps to review and strengthen the skills and knowledge of the whole governing body.
- Pupils say bullying is rare and dealt with successfully by staff. Throughout the school day, pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite, considerate and caring towards others. Staff and leaders are vigilant and give good support if individual pupils sometimes require additional help to behave.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- help and support for teaching assistants focuses closely on how they should improve their own teaching
- all parents are given a wide range of opportunities to share their views of the school; receive clear communication about how leaders have responded; and are provided with precise information about wider changes in the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Blackpool Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other senior leaders to discuss your reviews of the school and your priorities. We discussed improvement since the previous inspection and the impact on pupils' progress. We checked the safety of the premises, including the main access points to the school site and buildings. We looked at teaching within classrooms and considered the work being completed. We met with a sample of pupils from across the school as well as speaking to some pupils in classrooms and corridors. We spoke to a sample of staff, including checking their knowledge of safeguarding. We discussed with leaders how the school makes sure pupils are protected from harm. We asked you and a senior administrator about staff recruitment. We checked records of the suitability of staff and volunteers. We met with three members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Two of the governors we met are members of the Blackpool Multi-Academy Trust. We reviewed the views of parents that were shared through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. We considered information from school surveys of parents. We spoke to several parents at the start of the inspection and reviewed an additional letter sent by a parent.