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Mrs Michelle Ashfield  
Headteacher  
The Arches Community Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Ashfield

### **Short inspection of The Arches Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 May 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created a calm and nurturing school which welcomes and values everyone. You and the staff are highly committed and make a positive difference to the lives of pupils and families in the community. Pupils thrive and work well together regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or family background. You clearly fulfil your mission that the school is a place where you 'respect each other and learn together'. The strong relationships and caring ethos ensure that pupils feel safe and happy. As a result of continued good teaching and your striking commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils flourish in The Arches Primary School.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve provision in the early years, especially in the development of children's literacy skills. There has been significant improvement in all aspects of children's learning in the early years and they make good progress from their low starting points on entry to school. Carefully planned activities excite children. Pupils focus very well on their tasks, which challenge and encourage them to develop a wide range of skills, including writing. Children also develop a love of reading and were keen to show me the books in their library. They giggled with delight as they explained how the model they were building was a replica from their reading book, 'Aliens Love Underpants'.

Leaders were also asked to improve the teaching of mathematics in key stage 1. This area has been addressed in full. You and the deputy headteacher provided

additional training for all staff, leading to more opportunities for pupils to solve problems and use their reasoning skills. Pupils use their mathematical skills in other subjects, including geography and science. You regularly review the quality of teaching and monitor the progress pupils make. The tracking information and work in books show that a higher proportion of pupils are reaching the standards expected of them.

You and the leadership team accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You have created an improvement plan which identifies the most important priorities. There is a track record of improving standards over time. At the last inspection, you were also asked to raise attainment in writing in key stage 2. This has been successfully achieved and the rate of progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics is increasing. However, you are alert to the fact that the proportion of pupils attaining at greater depth at the end of Year 2 and the higher standard by Year 6 is lower than average, especially in reading and writing. You explained that the school's efforts have focused on supporting lower- and middle-ability pupils. A key priority for the school is to identify the most able pupils earlier and provide them with greater levels of challenge.

Governors demonstrate they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They visit the school regularly and are kept well informed, by you and other leaders, about the progress the school is making. Governors provide effective challenge and hold you and leaders to account well.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are robust and are fit for purpose. The safety of pupils is integral to all aspects of the school's work. For example, throughout the school there are carefully designed spaces to enable well-trained staff to support the emotional well-being and mental health of vulnerable pupils. Every parent and carer who contributed their views to the inspection agreed their child feels safe and is looked after very well.

Staff and governors are vigilant in their approach to safeguarding. Governors regularly check the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe and use their knowledge to ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are compliant.

The school's curriculum deliberately addresses issues of safety for pupils, including anti-bullying and online safety. Pupils are well prepared to deal with any incident.

The highly skilled safeguarding team closely monitors all aspects of pupils' welfare, including attendance and punctuality. They respond swiftly to support pupils and families when problems arise. Documentation is thorough, detailed and comprehensive. There are very good systems in place to share information with other agencies, which mean the support for families is highly effective.

## Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to consider whether the teaching of phonics was helping pupils to learn letters and sounds quickly enough. This is because for the past three years, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the end of Year 1 phonics screening check was lower than the national average. You explained that leaders identified this as an area for improvement and the actions you have put in place have been effective. You restructured the staffing in school to increase the amount of support for pupils. You make sure teachers carefully assess pupils' knowledge of phonics and those who are not making enough progress are given extra support to help them catch up. Skilled teachers use their very good subject knowledge well and learning enthuses pupils. Pupils hear and say sounds accurately and have plenty of opportunities to practise them. As a result, a higher proportion of pupils are reaching the standards expected of them and they make good progress in their learning.
- My second line of enquiry was focused on the quality of the teaching of reading and writing in key stage 1. The proportions of pupils who reached the expected standard in both areas in 2017 were below the national average. You and leaders have taken effective steps to improve pupils' outcomes in reading and writing. Regular checks on the quality of teaching enable you to provide tailored training to meet the professional needs of each member of staff. You provide opportunities for staff to share good practice with colleagues, within school and further afield. You have introduced new resources which are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Additional teaching assistants target individuals and groups of pupils who need extra help. These measures are proving successful and the school's own data shows a higher proportion of pupils are on track to meet the standards expected of them. However, you have identified that some pupils could be challenged even further to enable them to reach greater depth in their writing.
- I wanted to find out why the progress pupils made in writing and mathematics in key stage 2 has fluctuated over the last two years. From observing in classes, looking in pupils' books, talking with pupils and reviewing the school's monitoring data, a consistent approach to the teaching of writing across the school was evident. You have introduced strategies to support pupils to talk about and adapt their stories to help create their own. Pupils write across a wide variety of subject areas and genres. As they move through the school, pupils become increasingly confident and accurate when editing their work and develop a greater understanding of how to make their writing interesting. The majority of pupils take pride in their written work, which is well presented, and they make good progress. Although there are some variations in the assessments teachers make, sustained progress in pupils' work is evident.
- In previous years, progress in mathematics was strong, and significantly above the national average. It appeared to dip in 2017, although it was still in line with other schools nationally. You explained this decline in pupils' attainment in mathematics was due to a small number of pupils who did not perform as well as anticipated on the day. Three pupils missed the expected standard by only one or two marks. This had a significant impact on the test data in 2017. Leaders and

governors have taken effective action to improve provision in mathematics so pupils make good and consistent progress. Work in pupils' books shows they now solve increasingly complex mathematical problems and become more fluent in mathematical operations.

- Pupils' progress is kept under regular and frequent review and progress meetings are used to discuss pupils' individual learning. Low-ability and disadvantaged pupils are carefully monitored so any gaps in progress or attainment can be identified. You use a tracking system to identify any potential underachievement. However, the tracking information shows some significant variations in the progress pupils appear to make in different subjects. For example, in some year groups progress in writing seems much slower than in mathematics or reading while in others, reading is the weaker area. We agreed that greater consistency in the way teachers assess pupils' work would allow leaders and governors to have a more accurate understanding of the school's performance throughout the year.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems are refined to enable leaders to have a more accurate overview of the progress pupils make from their different starting points, as they move through the school
- the most able pupils are challenged further to achieve at the higher standard and greater depth in reading and writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Parkinson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and some subject leaders. I met with the school's family support worker and head of enhanced provision. I spoke with the local authority school improvement partner. I met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I visited several classes and you and the deputy headteacher observed teaching and learning with me. Together with some teachers, I looked at pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils from the learning council. I took account of the 13 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and evaluated the free-text responses. I also received two letters from parents. I considered the 23 responses from staff to the Ofsted online questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation, including the

school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I viewed a range of information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding document and I undertook a review of the school's website.