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Paul Reid
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Dear Mr Reid

Short inspection of The Spalding St John the Baptist Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 December 2012.

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 recently successfully steered the school through a turbulent time of staffing and governance change. Your self-evaluation summary is accurate and the plans for school improvement are clear and concise. As a result of this, the experienced deputy head teacher, phase leaders and governors know the strengths and areas for development in the school very well.

In 2016, pupil outcomes at the end of key stage 2 dipped in writing. However, you have swiftly identified the reasons for this and have taken decisive action to ensure that the development of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills is becoming embedded in extended pieces of writing. You have also begun to moderate pupils' work with other schools to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' writing are accurate.

Parents are overwhelming in their praise for the efforts taken by you and your staff to ensure that pupils feel safe, make good progress and enjoy their time at the school. One parent commented, 'I can't fault it, it's a brilliant school.'

The previous inspection report highlighted the need for staff to share outstanding practice and to ensure that lesson observations have a clear focus on the impact of teaching on the learning and progress of all pupils. It is clear from my discussions

with you and with senior leaders that you have addressed this well, for example through teachers observing each other teach and providing them with more opportunities to share ideas.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified the need for teachers to check regularly, throughout lessons, that pupils are clear about their work and that teachers use questioning more effectively to engage pupils in their learning. As I toured the school with you, I spoke to many pupils who were clear about what they had been asked to do. Their comments indicated that this was a typical occurrence. I also heard many examples of teachers and teaching assistants asking questions that helped to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. Leaders have therefore been successful in addressing the areas for improvement highlighted at the previous inspection.

When visiting classrooms with you, I observed many examples of pupils who were concentrating and fully engaged in activities. There is a distinct 'working atmosphere' in classes as pupils confidently discuss their learning with each other and with other adults. In Year 2, for example, pupils were challenged appropriately to deepen their knowledge of fractions. In Year 5, pupils were enjoying improving a piece of writing about a highwayman by changing vocabulary, adding clauses, similes and examples of alliteration.

Pupils are well behaved, both in classrooms and when outside. They look smart in their uniform and are polite with each other, adults and visitors. They take pride in their work and in their school.

You have correctly identified that teaching assistants can occasionally offer too much support for pupils. I observed that recent training for teaching assistants has encouraged them to ask more thought-provoking and open-ended questions. This successfully helps pupils develop their confidence and independence when completing activities.

Leaders are committed to providing pupils with a broad, balanced and extended curriculum. One such example is the 'growing project' and on-site allotment. This allows pupils to deepen their scientific knowledge as well as their understanding of how food is produced.

The good work the school is doing to promote pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills, and to ensure that these skills are then transferred into pupils' extended writing across the curriculum, needs to continue. The school would benefit from further increasing opportunities for teachers to externally moderate pupils' extended writing in order to validate the accuracy of their own assessment judgements.

Governors, new to the role, understand that they need to develop their knowledge of the new accountability measures. This would enable them to challenge school leaders more robustly about the progress made by different groups of pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding and the welfare of pupils are of the upmost importance at Spalding St John. You ensure that all the appropriate vetting checks take place before an adult works at the school. These records are well organised, detailed and the person responsible for them is knowledgeable and has received up-to-date training. You have a strong system in place for staff to report any concerns they may have regarding a child's welfare. You make timely referrals to outside agencies so that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need quickly. Staff and governors have received relevant safeguarding training and speak knowledgeably about issues relating to safeguarding pupils.

The vast majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, said that their child was safe in school. Pupils overwhelmingly say that they feel safe and they spoke particularly confidently regarding online safety. Pupils told me that bullying was very rare, but if they had any concerns then there were adults in school that would help to stop it.

Inspection findings

- There is a strong assessment system in place to monitor and track the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Teachers undertake termly pupil progress meetings with senior leaders to identify any pupils who may be falling behind. Consequently, these pupils are given the support they need in order to catch up quickly. Teachers work closely with disadvantaged pupils, including the most able of these pupils, to ensure that they are making the progress of which they are capable.
- The leader of the early years foundation stage has ensured that the provision children receive is of a high quality. The indoor classrooms and outdoor learning areas have a wide range of activities that stimulate and engage children. This, when combined with the good teaching they receive, helps them to make good progress from their starting points. Current information provided by the school indicates that the proportions of children on track to reach a good level of development in 2017 will be broadly in line with the national average.
- Leaders' recent work to improve standards in mathematics has been successful. The emphasis on problem-solving and reasoning led to pupils in 2016 achieving better outcomes than other pupils nationally in mathematics.
- At the time of the last inspection, just over half of pupils achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. In 2016, this figure rose sharply to be well above the national average. This is because the phase leader has implemented an effective approach to the teaching of letters and sounds across early years and Year 1.
- Current work in pupils' books and information provided by the school indicates that the vast majority of pupils are on track to achieve age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the current academic year.
- Pupils told me that they enjoy school, particularly educational and residential visits. Examples include Year 6 who recently extended their knowledge and understanding of the second world war by visiting Duxford Aerodrome and pupils who, when in Year 2, enjoyed a visit to Wells-next-the-Sea.

- Leaders value parental engagement and regularly hold workshops that inform them of the latest developments in, for example, the teaching of phonics and mathematics. These are well attended, especially by parents of younger pupils in the school.
- Governors are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and keen for the school to do well. They hold leaders to account by asking challenging questions in meetings and by making visits to school in order to help assess the impact of new initiatives. New governors need to ensure that relevant training is undertaken so that they are able to fully understand the pupil progress information provided by the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers embed the positive work they are undertaking to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills in extended pieces of writing in different subjects.
- leaders ensure that the accuracy of teachers' assessments in writing continue to be improved through joint moderation work with external partners.
- Governors, in particular new governors, undertake appropriate training in order to better understand the progress that pupils make, in particular that of disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy head teacher, two phase leaders, the leader for special educational needs, four members of the governing body, including the chair and the chairs of different committees, and a group of eight pupils. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised a range of the school's documents, including those relating to the progress of pupils, the school's improvement planning, its self-evaluation and documents relating to safeguarding. I visited most of the classrooms to see the learning that was taking place. I spoke with pupils and looked at the work in their books. I listened to eight pupils read. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning and I took account of the views of staff and parents through responses to their respective online surveys.