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Ms Liz Stiddard
Executive Headteacher
Norton-sub-Hamdon Church of England Primary School
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Dear Ms Stiddard

Short inspection of Norton-sub-Hamdon Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You demonstrate commitment, purpose and ambition in your leadership of the school. Following your appointment as executive headteacher in September 2016, you have set high expectations for pupils' achievement and successfully sought to support staff development through effective collaboration with other schools.

You have a precise and accurate understanding of what the school does well and what could be even better. You use assessment and monitoring information effectively to identify key areas that require further improvement. You ensure that objectives for school improvement work are precise, measurable and firmly rooted in improving outcomes for pupils.

Throughout my visit, pupils displayed positive attitudes to their learning. They are interested and enthusiastic. They spoke to me with confidence about their work. This is because you are providing them with a positive learning environment in which they can flourish. Our visits to lessons showed how adults encourage and value pupils' contributions. All staff who responded to the survey said that they enjoy working at this school. They agree that they are treated fairly and that leaders are considerate to the well-being of individuals.

The results of the national curriculum assessments in writing in 2016 showed that all pupils made exceptionally strong progress. Consequently, pupils' achievement in writing was deemed to be in the top 10% of schools nationally. You rightly attribute this success to the positive impact of whole-school initiatives. For example, teachers use a range of stimuli to foster a love of writing. This promotes pupils' enthusiasm and imagination. Evidence in pupils' writing books shows that they are applying a varied range of age-appropriate skills to engage the reader. High expectations for pupils' achievement in writing are maintained across the curriculum. Furthermore, opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their abilities to write at greater depth are used well.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff have created a caring school where pupils are happy, enjoy learning and feel safe. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action is taken to safeguard pupils. Most staff have a clear understanding of the school's policies and procedures around safeguarding. However, you acknowledge the need for some support staff to complete their training on the 'Prevent' duty and awareness of female genital mutilation. Staff use their knowledge of the school's safeguarding systems effectively to ensure that any worries about pupils' welfare are raised swiftly. Concerns are logged and followed up in a timely manner to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for pupils and their families. Rigorous checks are made to ensure that staff and other adults, who are involved in the school, are suitable to work with children. For example, safer recruitment practices explore candidates' awareness of safeguarding issues, ensuring that this is a key part of the interview process.

Leaders are alert to the needs of vulnerable pupils. They monitor them carefully to ensure that any changes in behaviour or well-being are identified and followed up immediately. School leaders liaise effectively with external agencies to ensure that appropriate support, including early help, is effective.

Pupils speak confidently about the school's work in keeping them safe. They say that there is always someone there for them if they feel upset or have a concern or worry. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. For example, they know that they should never agree to meet up with someone whom they have met online. Pupils report that bullying is not a problem at this school. They say that if they have concerns about another pupil's behaviour they tell an adult immediately. Parents' views on the school's work in keeping pupils safe are largely positive. Nearly all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their child feels safe in school and is well looked after. A typical comment written by a parent was, 'The school has a lovely family atmosphere where the children learn to look out for each other.' Another wrote, 'Each child is treated as an individual and known very well by everyone.'

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on evaluating leaders' actions in raising pupils' achievement in mathematics. In the 2016 key stage 2 tests, pupils, particularly girls, did not achieve as well in mathematics as they did in reading and writing. A detailed analysis of pupils' achievement in this subject area has enabled leaders to identify specific areas for improvement. Consequently, a range of well-targeted actions have been implemented across the school to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable. The result of these actions can be seen in pupils' books, which show their better progress.
- Our visits to classrooms showed that pupils have a good range of opportunities to develop their mathematical fluency and consolidate their skills before moving on. Pupils, including the disadvantaged, are confident to use a range of approaches to support their mathematical learning, including practical apparatus and jottings. They use these effectively to firmly consolidate new learning. For example, a pupil in Year 2 confidently explained to me how he had used a number line to count in tens to solve an addition calculation. However, you acknowledge the need to build on pupils' fluency of number to develop reasoning and problem-solving.
- Staff monitor pupils' learning in mathematics lessons effectively. They are quick to intervene and address misconceptions and misunderstandings. Consequently, pupils have a good degree of success in acquiring appropriate skills related to their individual starting points. Our visits to lessons and scrutiny of books show that different groups of pupils, including girls, are progressing well. Girls show increasing confidence to answer mathematical questions and will readily have a go at new mathematical challenges. However, middle-ability pupils and the most able who grasp concepts quickly are not being challenged enough.
- I also focused on evaluating leaders' actions in supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have a thorough and in-depth grasp of the needs of these pupils. They ensure that robust systems guarantee the timely referral of pupils who may have barriers to their learning. Staff use these systems successfully to pinpoint the precise nature of their concerns. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They focus attentively on the needs of individuals, ensuring that pupils maintain a good level of engagement and experience success in their learning.
- Leaders use assessment information and observations to check the appropriateness of the help and support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This ensures that actions are having the desired effect on improving learning outcomes over time. Evidence in books shows that most of these pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

- Next, I evaluated leaders' actions to further improve the quality of teaching. This was identified as an area for further improvement in the previous inspection report. Your efforts to provide staff with appropriate training and support have been well focused and closely linked to school improvement priorities. Consequently, you have striven to maximise the impact that staff development has on pupils' achievement. During our learning walks, we observed staff skilfully questioning pupils to check their understanding and challenge their thinking. For example, a pupil in Year 3 was asked to explain the value of 9 in 394. Pupils readily engaged in this interaction, yielding positive benefits for their learning.
- You have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching over time and recognise the potential in individual staff members. All staff who responded to the survey agreed that training is used effectively to challenge and support them. Scrutiny of leaders' monitoring of teaching showed that you are effectively identifying strengths and further areas for development. However, you do not evaluate fully the impact teaching has on the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils, including the most able.
- My final line of enquiry evaluated how well leaders, particularly governors, assess the impact of school improvement initiatives. My discussion with governors highlighted a detailed and precise understanding of the school's current performance. Governors speak authoritatively about the actions school leaders have taken to bring about further improvement. For example, they spoke confidently about the school's work to further improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. Governors articulate a secure understanding of the school's previous assessment results, and understand the purpose and intentions of key school initiatives. Governors speak passionately about the school's use of the sport premium and how this is improving pupils' attainment and participation in physical activity. They are very proud of the school's successes in local sporting events, including cross-country running.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers move pupils on to more challenging work in mathematics, particularly the most able
- teaching in mathematics builds on pupils' fluency of number to develop reasoning and problem-solving
- the monitoring of learning fully takes into account the impact teaching has on improving standards for different groups of pupils, including the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Swait
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, staff, pupils and five members of the governing body. I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I also spoke to parents at the end of the school day.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's development plans, attendance rates, monitoring records and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 31 responses to Parent View and 10 responses to the staff questionnaire.