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8 May 2019

Miss Debra McGrail
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Dear Miss McGrail

Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Primary, Hurst

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2019, 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 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staff morale is high. All staff who responded to the confidential staff questionnaire agreed that the school is well led and managed. The determined leadership that you, your senior leaders and governors provide ensures that the school continues to strengthen. You lead by example and are very proud and committed to the school.

The school is a positive and welcoming place. Pupils are polite, well-mannered and show respect for each other and for adults. Pupils work well together in lessons. I witnessed many examples of collaborative work. For example, in one mathematics lesson, pupils were developing their understanding of positive and negative numbers while solving problems. This enabled them to identify where they had made mistakes and learn from each other.

Pupils are happy to come to school and their attendance is higher than the national averages. They describe their school as 'amazing', 'great' and 'caring'. They are clearly proud of their school and enjoy the range of experiences that staff provide.

Staff, parents and carers are extremely enthusiastic about all aspects of the school's work. One parent said, 'The school is so nurturing, has a lovely community feel and has a wonderful ethos. The teachers really care about the children and always put in 110%.'

You have built on the strengths of the school and tackled the areas that needed to improve. At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve pupils' achievement at the end of Reception and in the Year 1 phonics screening check. School records and 2018 outcomes indicate that your work in these areas has had an impact with the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard being well above the national averages.

You and your leaders are good at identifying how to improve pupils' progress. Pupils make better progress in reading and writing than they do in mathematics. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of the teaching of mathematics in some classes. You have identified this as a priority in your development plans and recognise that mathematics needs to be more challenging, particularly for the girls, to enable them to make greater progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Your checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough. Training for staff is up to date and in line with the latest statutory guidance. There is a strong culture of promoting pupils' well-being and safety in the school. One pupil said, 'It is a great community and everyone helps each other.'

You and your team have created a strong sense of community, based on Christian values. Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy their learning. Pupils I spoke with confidently described the range of strategies they used to stay safe. For example, they knew how to stay safe when using the internet. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. The vast majority of parents who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, stated that pupils are safe and well looked after at this school. One parent commented, 'St Nicholas is a lovely, warm and caring school.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at the effectiveness of safeguarding, how effectively you have improved the teaching of writing, the progress of pupils, including girls, in mathematics and the progress of the most able pupils at key stage 1 in writing.
- In 2018, the proportion of girls that made good progress in mathematics was lower than that of other girls nationally with similar starting points. You and your team identified weaknesses in pupils' understanding in mathematics and, as a result, you have revised the curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils, particularly the girls. Regular problem-solving activities now form a part of the mathematics work to help pupils apply their understanding to real-life contexts. You and your team have identified that further work is needed to challenge girls in mathematics and to enable them to develop a deep understanding and reach the higher standards.

- The previous inspection report asked that you stretch pupils further in lessons, including the most able, so that they make better progress. In 2018 at key stage 2, more pupils reached the higher standard in writing than previously. The school's reorganised curriculum enables teachers to focus on improving the range of writing that pupils have to experience.
- Pupils told me that they enjoy the writing topics. You introduced a more creative approach to writing using good-quality texts to engage pupils. Work in books and current assessment information show that the topics are having a positive effect on writing outcomes. Writing in pupils' books confirms that pupils are becoming increasingly skilled at editing and improving their writing. Pupils take pride in their work and present it neatly.
- The curriculum has been well designed so that pupils acquire skills, knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects. Right from the start, pupils are given the chance to explore the world around them. Pupils enjoy a wide range of educational visits and told me how much they enjoy learning in different situations. These experiences help to improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer including judo, science and football. These contribute to pupils' well-rounded and enjoyable education.
- Senior leaders work collaboratively as an effective team. They lead by example and keep a careful check on the quality of teaching and pupils' work in books. There is some variability in the accuracy of teachers' assessments and these do not always reflect the good progress seen in pupils' work. The headteacher accepts that there are some weaknesses in the school's development plans for improving teaching and learning. For example, they do not include clear measurable milestones or targets to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of their planned actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' rates of progress in mathematics continue to improve, particularly for the most able girls
- they refine their development plans to include clear milestones and targets to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of these plans.

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

Yours sincerely

David Harris
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and several members of staff. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. Together, we undertook observations of learning in lessons. I examined pupils' work, focusing on mathematics and writing. I held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of governors. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents, including the school's website, published performance information and a summary of your school's self-evaluation document. I took account of 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 written comments. I also considered 18 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 60 responses to the pupil questionnaire. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.