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Mr Andrew Barber
Headteacher
Hertford Vale Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Staxton
Ings Lane
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Dear Mr Barber

Short inspection of Hertford Vale Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Staxton

Following my visit to the school on 27 April 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 March 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 know the school very well. Together with the assistant headteacher, you assess accurately the school's effectiveness and know what it does well and what could be even better. You use this information to put appropriate plans in place to improve the school further. For example, following 2017 outcomes, there has been a focus on further developing reading and mathematics. There has been a raft of staff training and this is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.

You and your staff have made progress addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Teachers check work more regularly, and pupils' books demonstrate that they are given time to reflect on lessons and respond to teachers' comments in a thoughtful way. The presentation of work and pupils' handwriting have improved across key stage 2 and pupils have more opportunities to write about a range of subjects. The school's assessment information and work in books shows that pupils are making expected progress in mathematics. However, opportunities to develop pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills are sometimes overlooked.

Working in partnership with the assistant headteacher and the whole staff, you have created a very special ethos that is, rightly, valued by pupils and their parents

and carers. This is a very welcoming and happy school where each pupil is known and valued for their individuality. Pupils value the caring ethos and speak very positively about the fact that, at this Christian school, they are taught about a wide variety of world religions. For example, they recall a visit from a Buddhist nun who taught them about meditation and reflection.

Parents who spoke with me said that they are confident that their children are well looked after and they value the individual support that their children receive from staff. The school is a hive of activity, with interested, enthusiastic pupils and staff. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy finding out new things and work very well together. Pupils are proud of their work. Older pupils are particularly pleased with the development of their cursive handwriting style.

Effective monitoring ensures that teaching remains consistently good, with teachers in all classes expecting much of their pupils. The school not only ensures that pupils do well academically; it also offers a rich and varied curriculum that gives pupils memorable experiences and enables them to do well in a range of subjects, including music, art and sport.

Governors know the school very well. They understand the school, and the pupil performance data, well. They use the information they receive about pupils' attainment and progress to challenge leaders to secure further improvements. For example, they recognise that more can be done to raise standards for the most able pupils in reading and mathematics. The safeguarding governor has a clear understanding of the school's procedures and has used this knowledge to challenge leaders to make their procedures even more effective, for example by ensuring that decisions about whether or not to involve other agencies are checked by at least one other member of staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that a culture of safeguarding permeates the work of the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders keep careful records of any concerns and work closely with other agencies. The single central record of employment checks is complete and thorough. Staff receive regular updates and training connected to safeguarding. The site is well maintained and there are good procedures in place to identify any potential health and safety risks so that any risks can be managed. Pupils said that they feel safe in school and bullying is not an issue. They said that they can approach staff with any concerns and are confident that concerns will be dealt with.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, you and I agreed key lines of enquiry to test out whether the school remained good. The first line of enquiry considered the rates of pupils' progress in reading and mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils. Although attainment at the end of Year 6 is typically average or better, the progress pupils make from their individual starting points varies from year to

year. For the pupils in Year 6 in 2017 for example, the progress they had made across the key stage varied and for some of the most able pupils was too slow.

- Leaders had already identified the need to further increase the progress of most-able pupils in reading and mathematics across key stage 2. There is clear evidence that the current Year 6 pupils are on track to make at least expected progress. The majority of the most able pupils in Year 6 are on track to secure greater depth in both reading and mathematics this year because teaching is effective.
- Although progress is good, overall the school's assessment information shows that there is a mixed picture of attainment and progress in reading and mathematics across the school for the most able pupils, particularly boys. Across key stage 2, the progress of the most able pupils varies and few boys are securely on track to reach greater depth. The scrutiny of exercise books identified some good examples of problem solving and reasoning, particularly in the work of the oldest pupils. However, in some classes this was less well developed.
- The second line of enquiry centred around how well the planned work met the differing needs of pupils, particularly the most able. In some of the classes you and I observed together, it was evident that some work lacks challenge at times, particularly for the most able pupils. Sometimes, learning slows when pupils have completed their tasks and have to wait for others to catch up. Although exercise books confirmed that, in some classes, work is well matched to pupils' needs, this is not always the case.
- My next key line of enquiry focused on pupils' progress in phonics and early reading. This is because, for the last three years, the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in the national Year 1 phonics screening check has been below average. Making sure that all pupils make strong progress in reading is already a priority for improvement identified by school leaders. Your sharpened focus on teaching phonics is proving to be successful. Staff now track pupils' progress in phonics carefully, identifying gaps in understanding at an early stage. The pupils who read to me used their developing phonic skills well to tackle unknown words.
- The next line of enquiry considered how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs and interests. This was because when preparing for the inspection, the information available to me about the curriculum on the school's website was limited. Some pieces of required information about the school's reading and phonic schemes were not available. In our discussions, you explained that there had been some technical and administrative difficulties that have resulted in some required curriculum information being removed from the website. This is now being rectified so that information about which aspects of the national curriculum are taught to each year group over the year and over each key stage is provided.
- Work in pupils' books, the school's curriculum planning documents and discussions with pupils confirm that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils talked very positively about the interesting activities they have enjoyed in school. They recall visits and visitors into school. They particularly enjoy sporting activities and the visiting French teacher. During my visit, older pupils

enthusiastically took part in an afternoon learning about first aid and staying safe.

- There have clearly been improvements in the presentation of pupils' work and their handwriting since the last inspection, particularly across key stage 2. Older pupils have developed a clear and legible handwriting style and are, rightly, proud of their work. However, together, you and I identified that some younger pupils are not accurately forming letters correctly when they are writing. This is not always being addressed by all teachers.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider how effectively leaders evaluate the work of the school and identify areas for improvement. Your self-evaluation is very largely accurate. You and your leaders observe teaching and scrutinise work in exercise books to check on the impact of planned developments. This, coupled with staff training, is helping to ensure that any shortcomings are tackled.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of early writing is further refined so that more children can form letters correctly
- the most able pupils are consistently given challenging work so that a higher proportion reach standards of greater depth in their reading and mathematics
- pupils are given more opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, five members of the governing body and the local authority school improvement adviser. I met with parents at the end of the school day and took account of the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed a range of documents including your self-evaluation, school development plan, assessment and progress information, and documents relating to safeguarding, staff recruitment checks and child protection procedures. With you, I visited classes to observe teaching and learning. I spoke to pupils and staff. I looked at pupils' work both in and out of lessons and I listened to some pupils read.