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Claire Minogue  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Minogue

### **Short inspection of Denby Church of England Voluntary Aided First School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 2016, 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 2011.

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

Following the resignation of the previous headteacher in August 2015, you were appointed as interim headteacher. You worked with this school's governing body and those of Farnley Tyas and Thurstonland schools to secure a formal federation. In January 2016, you were appointed as executive headteacher for the federation. Since then, you and the new governing body have worked hard and systematically to build a leadership team which works across the three schools.

You recognise that the vast majority of pupils start their school careers well prepared and well supported to learn. Many arrive with a level of development that exceeds that expected for their age, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

You are building on the strengths of the teachers and other staff to ensure that they use their detailed knowledge of each of the 73 pupils effectively. You and your team are focused on ensuring that lessons enable all pupils to make consistently good gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills over a wide range of subjects. For example, you asked the local authority to check the skills of all the staff teaching phonics, were reassured by its evaluation, and are acting on the recommendations to secure further improvements.

You have made sure that pupils benefit from teachers working closely with other teachers in the federation and with other schools in the local area. As a result, for example, pupils' progress in science is improving as scientific learning and exploration now have a higher profile in school. Your commitment to working with other schools also provides opportunities for the most able pupils to be challenged to explore a range of subjects at greater depth with a wider cohort of similar pupils.

Since the last inspection, teachers have responded positively to the challenge of ensuring that pupils learn about the wider British society beyond their local community. As a result of visits to different places of worship and visiting speakers, pupils are learning to respect the richness of diverse faiths and cultures. Pen pals in Romania have opened the pupils' eyes to the lives of children who do not enjoy their level of material wealth.

Teaching, learning and assessment remain strong. Lessons visited and much, but not all, work in pupils' books show that teachers plan work to match the different levels of attainment in the mixed-aged classes. Pupils do have opportunities to write at length, but sometimes teachers use strategies that restrict pupils' opportunity to extend their thinking through their writing. Pupils are clear about what they need to learn in lessons and most respond to teachers' verbal and written feedback. This supports their progress to achieve the higher standards of which they are capable. However, some teachers do not consistently expect good standards of presentation, or require older pupils to always use upper- and lower-case letters in the right place. Some pupils avoid the school's requirement to correct spelling mistakes, so the standard achieved in their writing is not as good as it could be. The level of inconsistency means that overall, good rather than outstanding progress is evident in pupils' books.

The governing body has been highly effective in securing the continued success of the school. The newly established leadership team, working across the federation, has good capacity to continue to improve the outcomes for pupils. However, the governing body has not made sure that everything it must publish has been made available on the school's website or that all required policies are up to date. Governors have established a plan to ensure that this area of their work is systematically addressed in the future.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils, their parents and staff are all confident that pupils are safe and well cared for. My observations of pupils throughout the day confirmed their views.

You and the assistant headteacher have recently undertaken the appropriate training to ensure that there is always someone on site with the right level of knowledge to whom staff can report their concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Following the training, you have changed the reporting system. The new system has given staff more confidence to report low-level concerns. Files show that this system is working well. Staff are not letting their knowledge of pupils and their families cloud their judgements when they have concerns.

The record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children was not complete when I checked. You made sure that this was amended during the inspection and confirmed that all the checks had taken place and were recorded by the local authority. Staff files indicate that you ask questions about safeguarding knowledge and collect appropriate references for all staff before confirming their appointment.

Governors have worked effectively to resolve a longstanding problem with the low wall separating the front playground from the road. The development of the rear playground means that all the pupils can play and learn together in an interesting and varied space, safely, at the back of the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- As the numbers of pupils in each year group are small and vary over time, comparison with the attainment of pupils in other schools is of limited benefit. Leaders' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of each pupil are the effective foundations for ensuring that pupils make at least good progress from their starting points.
- In 2016, overall, children in the Reception class and older pupils made good progress, as they have in previous years. Good progress over a range of subjects is evident in their current books.
- By the end of Year 2, a good proportion of pupils were working at higher standards than expected in reading and mathematics, although fewer were working at greater depth in writing.
- Teachers' assessment information and pupils' work confirm that this good progress continues until pupils leave school at the end of Year 5. Progress is strong across a range of subjects as a result of effective teaching.
- Pupils read for pleasure and to research new knowledge. Pupils heard reading did so confidently, using a range of strategies to ensure that they understood the meaning of the text. A very small number of pupils, including most-able pupils, were not skilled in using phonics to work out new words. Teachers have a clear understanding of the reasons for this and are putting the appropriate interventions in place.
- The very small number of pupils who need additional support to ensure that they overcome different barriers to their learning are well supported and make good progress. However, their individual educational plans do not clearly state what they are expected to achieve as a result of the extra support they get. This means that leaders cannot clearly identify which approaches work best and which are less effective.
- Staff have a consistent and calm approach to supporting pupils' social development. Pupils quickly learn how to play together and resolve any 'falling outs'. The older pupils get the opportunity to take on responsibilities, and many were seen spontaneously offering support to younger pupils in a caring and empathetic way.

- Pupils' attendance remains high. You ensure that the parents of pupils who do not attend as often as they should are given appropriate support and encouragement.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they keep up with their plan to publish up-to-date information on the school's website
- planning for pupils who need additional support for their learning is precise and leads to pupils making measurable progress in the areas of their additional need
- teachers and other staff are consistent in their expectations of how pupils present their work and respond to teachers' comments and corrections.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Hayter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the day of the inspection, we discussed aspects of the school's work and we visited and reviewed samples of pupils' books from all three classes. I met with teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the director of education for the diocese of Leeds. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I met and talked with parents as they brought their children to school and spoke with pupils during breakfast club and at playtime. I reviewed a range of the school's documents, including those relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

I focused my inspection activity on areas identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection, particularly the pupils' opportunities to learn about different cultures and faiths. In addition I considered:

- the effectiveness of the new governance arrangements in holding leaders to account for the standards achieved by the pupils
- how leaders worked out how well different groups of pupils achieved through their knowledge of individual pupils' progress and attainment.