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Mrs L Thornes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thornes

Short inspection of North Cockerington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 January 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and the school is continuing to improve. The organisation is quite different from the time of that inspection as the school is now part of a federation with another local school, with you as headteacher of both. Governors took this decision to ensure the future of the school, which is an important part of the local community and highly valued by parents, many of whom travel from neighbouring towns and villages. Pupils I spoke to from Years 5 and 6 identified the partnership with the other school within the federation as a strength, as it allows them to widen their circle of friends and to take part in more sporting competitions. However, a minority of parents say they are still unclear and uncertain about the benefits of this arrangement and the merits of a shared headteacher.

School staff and governors are determined to provide the best possible education for the children and are ambitious for the school's future. They have high aspirations and expectations for all pupils. Leaders and governors have a comprehensive knowledge of pupils' attainment and are constantly seeking ways to improve the school and outcomes for pupils. One example of this is the video recording of teachers demonstrating strategies for mathematical calculations. These videos are then available to support pupils' learning and teachers' professional development.

Leaders and governors have acted effectively on the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. The creation of the federation has allowed teachers to extend and develop their leadership roles more quickly and there are clear lines of delegation and responsibility. Steps to improve the range and opportunities for pupils' writing have resulted in strong outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2, with the majority of pupils making more than expected progress in 2015. However, work in pupils' books identifies that teachers are not always precise enough in their identification of the next steps in pupils' learning to ensure that pupil progress is improved even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on keeping children safe. Year 5 and 6 pupils talk confidently about the measures taken to keep them safe from harm. Their consideration and care for other pupils reflects the school's values and ethos in a most practical way. Pupils value the connections with other schools, both abroad and in the United Kingdom. In particular, the link with a school in inner London is helping to equip them for life in modern Britain, with teacher exchange visits and the development of electronic penfriends. You and the school's governors see these links as an important step towards addressing the risk of extremism and promoting the fundamental British values of respect, tolerance and understanding. Pupils are confident that any adult in school will help them, should the need arise, but are equally sure that incidents of bullying and name-calling are rare. Where there have been any instances in the past, you have comprehensive documentation to show that you took decisive action, in line with statutory and school policies.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff and governors undertake regular training to ensure that their knowledge and practice is current. This is supported by clear and effective policies.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further development. There is a comprehensive plan for school improvement and governors are tenacious in ensuring its implementation. They are very clear about their roles and the importance of strong governance in driving school improvement. Minutes of meetings show that they have a well-developed understanding of pupil performance and they use this to hold school leaders to account. Regular skills audits enable the governing body to seek out expertise in education and business to improve their collective knowledge and impact. As a result, governance is a strong feature of the school.
- Parents and carers are very committed to the school, as shown by the number who took time to talk to me during the inspection and the letters I received.

They care passionately, with a number specifically identifying the school for their children because of its size and reputation within the community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the educational achievement of their children and believe that the level of care and support is of consistently high quality. Although the school makes every effort to keep parents informed through its website, newsletters and 'Meet the Headteacher' sessions, a minority believe that communication could be improved further. I was unable to substantiate this view during the inspection, with evidence identifying that you take all reasonable steps to keep parents well informed.

- Leaders review the progress of each pupil regularly through lesson observations, work scrutiny and ongoing assessment. A new tracking system is in place to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. From the review of pupils' work, which you and I undertook during the inspection, there is an accurate picture of pupil attainment and progress. Helpful and easily understood diagrams quickly identify any pupil who is performing less well and the initiatives in place to support them. Pupils make good progress over time; however, where progress is slower, teachers are not precise enough about the next steps in pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are not always able to transfer what they know to new situations or tasks, and recurring errors are not addressed consistently well. The quality of pupils' writing is improving although recent initiatives on presentation, marking and feedback are not yet fully embedded. Consequently, pupils are not consistently clear on how to improve their work. Reading is a strength of the school while mathematics and science books show that pupils are provided with opportunities to practise and apply their learning.
- Children enter the early years at levels of development which are broadly typical of children of their age. The proportion of children leaving Reception with a good level of development was below the national figure in 2015 and the school has acted quickly to identify the reasons for this and address them. Achievement in the Year 1 phonics screening has increased annually, with a greater than average proportion achieving the required standard in 2015. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils continue to make progress in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Key Stage 2, all pupils make at least the progress expected, and often more than expected, for children of their age.
- The small number of disadvantaged pupils are well supported through the use of the pupil premium. The full impact of this funding is not fully apparent through published data but there is evidence to show how their achievement is improving and potential barriers to their learning are being dismantled. Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities also achieve well. The school has an unusually high proportion of boys who, typically, attain well according to published data. There is no evidence that girls are disadvantaged, with a good example of writing taking place in Class 3 which was accessible and motivating to both genders.

- Pupils behave well around the school and at different times of the day. By Years 5 and 6, they are able to have well-developed conversations about what they have learned, while expressing mature and well-informed opinions. In lessons, they are engaged in their work and eager to do their best, displaying good attitudes to work. After a period of below-average attendance, there are encouraging signs that this trend has been reversed with above-average figures for the current academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' outcomes continue to improve through:
 - the precise identification of pupils' next steps in learning and ensuring that pupils fully understand how they can improve their work further.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met you, the school's subject leaders, three governors, parents, grandparents and the pupils from Year 6. I considered responses of parents from Parent View, two additional letters from a parent and grandparents, and the responses to the electronic surveys for staff and pupils. We visited all three classes in the school, spending a short time in each, and looked at a sample of pupils' work together. I looked at a range of documents including an evaluation of the school's performance and plans for further improvement, information on how the pupil premium is spent and a number of policy documents, including those for child protection and special educational needs.