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Mr Jonathan Wallace
Headteacher
Little Thetford CofE VC Primary School
Green Hill
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Dear Mr Wallace

Short inspection of Little Thetford CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite a number of significant changes to the leadership of the school, Little Thetford Primary School remains a very purposeful place in which to learn, underpinned by strong and distinctive Christian values and ethos.

Much has been achieved in this academic year since you have taken on the leadership of the school. Staff who were at the school at the previous inspection comment that now the school is even better; standards and support for pupils continue to improve. Your new approach to some areas of teaching and learning is helping to ensure that pupils receive a high-quality experience in their educational journey through the school.

Although at an early stage, your strategy to improve the achievement that pupils make in reading demonstrates that you and staff are working hard to make sure pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Pupils are now more able to explain their understanding of the books they enjoy reading because they have regular opportunities to respond to challenging activities that deepen their skills.

Your recent introduction of a more systematic approach to teaching spelling and grammar is contributing to better achievement in this subject area. Pupils' work in spelling lessons and homework shows accelerated progress over time. Older pupils

are applying their knowledge and skills more readily in their everyday writing. As a consequence, you have halted the decline in achievement in this subject.

Your vision and passion for improving the learning experiences of every individual is very evident. You have clearly focused on the correct priorities and are taking effective action to address areas of weakness. This is resulting in improved and accelerated progress for pupils.

The early years leads the way in ensuring that children get off to a flying start. Children enter the school with individual starting points that are generally in line with that expected for children of their age. The children clearly enjoy the well-planned learning opportunities on offer to them and they acquire new skills quickly and make good progress. They are very well prepared for the challenges of year 1.

Pupils are extremely polite and well mannered. Conduct around the school is exemplary. Pupils are proud of their environment and relationships with each other are for the most part, highly positive. Learning in lessons proceeds without interruption. Your work with pupils who have special educational needs or disability is a strength. The care, guidance and support they receive helps most of them make progress at the same rate as all pupils. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs or disability are often able to reach the same standards as others expected nationally, by the time they leave Little Thetford.

Governors have an accurate view of what is working well and what could be even better still. Although many are new to the role, over this year they have ensured that they have clear roles and responsibilities. They often visit the school and hold school leaders to account increasingly well for the progress that all pupils make.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory guidance. The school website contains the required information. You and your governors take every precaution to ensure that pupils are safe at school. You have established a strong safeguarding culture by training and developing staff and governors in the most up-to-date national safeguarding guidance. Staff know what to do if there are any concerns about a pupil.

All pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire and those spoken to during the inspection agreed that they feel safe and have someone to talk to if they are concerned. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe. Pupils are confident that the adults at school will deal well with conflict or potential bullying situations should they arise.

Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Governors are rigorous in ensuring that the necessary checks have been made and documents are in order.

Inspection findings

- In the last inspection, the inspector praised the school for many aspects of its work, especially its work on ensuring that pupils attain well throughout their time at the school and leave well prepared for the next stage of their education. At the end of the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils have continued to attain above that expected nationally for many years. Indications from your current school assessment information and pupils' books show that this is set to continue, even though the national benchmarks have also risen. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The school was asked to improve the progress of pupils in mathematics. This you have worked hard to achieve. Work in pupils' books show that they are developing secure numeracy skills and abilities from an early age. Pupils enjoy their mathematics lessons. In one lesson seen, older pupils were using resources effectively to practise their knowledge and understanding of complex shapes.
- You have brought renewed energy and vision to school improvement since taking on the leadership of Little Thetford this academic year. By asking questions of school staff and governors, you have a thorough and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, you have appropriate action plans in place that you continue to evaluate against the progress that pupils are making.
- In 2015, the achievement in grammar, punctuation and spelling dipped at key stage 2. You have been swift in addressing this issue and have introduced a more systematic approach to the teaching of spelling and grammar. Evidence in books and in your school assessment information shows that pupils are making accelerated progress. As a result, achievement at the end of Year 6 is set to rise considerably this academic year.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their education at Little Thetford. They explained that they are proud of their school environment and the friendships they make. Older pupils play easily with younger ones at breaktimes, acting as excellent role models and teaching them to play games using the resources that are available.
- The work in the early years ensures that children receive a strong foundation for their education. Children relish their learning and are safe, secure and confident. They make good progress from their individual starting points and many leave their Reception year exceeding the national expectations for their age. Children have the opportunity to express their views on their learning in their records known as 'learning journeys'. One view recorded was 'I can read my writing because I know my phonemes, I can write properly.'
- In 2015, the achievement of pupils in reading dropped. Even though you can give reasons for this change you have wasted no time in addressing this issue. Pupils now have daily opportunities to read and demonstrate their understanding of books which is proving effective in increasing the progress that pupils make. In one lesson seen, the teacher skilfully questioned and guided older pupils so they developed their reasoning skills. These pupils were then able to respond to written questions confidently because of the precise feedback they had received.

- You acknowledge some inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment. Your agreed approach means that teachers are only required to mark pupils' writing once a week. In most classes this approach is successful and pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work. In others, pupils do not receive sufficient guidance and replicate the same mistakes over and over again which has an impact on the progress that they can make.
- Pupils in lower key stage 2 are not making the same rates of progress as other pupils in the school. This is an area that you already know requires improvement so that pupils' progress does not slow down as they move through the school.
- You are aware that in subjects such as history and geography most-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged with tasks that help them think and explore well enough. Opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their mastery of literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are limited. This results in a few pupils not achieving their potential in all subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers apply the same high expectations in all subjects as they do in English and mathematics for the most-able pupils so they can excel
- leaders and teachers increase the progress of pupils in lower key stage 2 so that progress does not falter and is consistently good across the school
- teachers provide all pupils with timely guidance on how to improve their work so that mistakes are not repeated unnecessarily.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your assistant headteacher, English leader, members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority. I observed teaching in all classes over the day where I looked at pupils' work, to consider the quality of teaching over time and the progress pupils are making. I spent time speaking informally with pupils in class and at lunchtime. I reviewed school documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with young people, pupil attendance,

school self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. There were 32 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View that were considered, including 10 free text responses. The views of staff and pupils were also considered through the responses to their online questionnaire.