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Miss Tammy Docking
Head of School
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Dear Miss Docking

Short inspection of Ilsington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2012, shortly after the previous inspection, you have led the school through a period of considerable change. You have appointed new teachers in most classes and a number of teaching assistants. You have taken care in these appointments to ensure that new colleagues have particular skills and experience to improve the quality of teaching. You have been well supported through these changes by the executive headteacher for primary schools in the South Dartmoor Academy Trust.

You have successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers are now skilled at planning interesting opportunities to invigorate the curriculum. Many pupils spoke enthusiastically about their visit to Cardiff Castle where they learned about medieval life, especially the sport of jousting. You are aware that the improvements to the English and mathematics curriculum now need to be replicated across the full range of subjects. Over time, teaching staff have helped pupils be more resilient in their learning; they are not afraid to make mistakes and enjoy learning from them. The feedback pupils receive from teaching staff is helping them to improve the presentation of their work. Nonetheless, this guidance is not yet precise enough about how pupils can improve their work to reach the higher standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

The procedures for keeping pupils safe are strong. Adequate checks are in place for staff and volunteers who work at the school. Your regular briefings to all staff are informative and timely. Consequently, staff are well aware of the risks that children can face and know the signs to look out for, including from extremism.

Pupils are well prepared to face a wide range of situations they may encounter in the future, including on social media. Pupils told me that they feel safe. They all know which adult they would talk to if they had concerns and were confident that they would help them.

The school site is secure and arrangements for visitors are thorough.

Inspection findings

- Over recent years, pupils have made the progress expected of them in mathematics. However, too few have reached the highest standard. In 2016, only one of the three pupils who had the highest level of attainment at the end of key stage 1 achieved the high score at the end of key stage 2. Pupils currently at the school are making better progress in all years. This has involved pupils in early years and key stage 1 rapidly catching up. Many have ground to make up as many do not have secure mathematical knowledge when they start school. Teachers have identified the specific aspects of mathematics that each pupil does not fully understand. They plan learning carefully to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders use assessment information effectively to monitor pupils' progress and adapt their support and challenge for teachers. In lessons, teachers use apparatus, such as coins and number squares, to help pupils improve their understanding of number and relationships. Consequently, pupils are able to choose efficient methods in their calculations.
- In writing, leaders have adapted the curriculum to better meet the needs of all pupils, but especially the boys. For example, grammar has been taught in a particular way to improve the quality of boys' writing. Boys' work shows that they are increasingly using the correct grammar in their writing. Similarly, teachers have carefully chosen topics to engage boys in their writing. Stimuli, such as the visit to see jousting at Cardiff Castle and the 'alien invasion', have been used to good effect to improve the quality of boys' writing. Work seen in pupils' English books during the inspection shows improvement in the quality of writing as the term progresses. For some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, the progress is very rapid. Leaders and governors have precisely directed the pupil premium grant to best support disadvantaged pupils in overcoming the specific hurdles they face. The same high-quality writing is not seen in pupils' topic work. Expectations are not as high here and teaching is not as well planned to allow pupils the same opportunities as they have in their English work. This is particularly the case in science.

- The school has a larger than average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their needs are wide ranging and often complex. Leaders have arranged good support for these pupils for both their academic progress and their personal and social development. The head of school has undertaken postgraduate study, so she has a full understanding of the specific barriers pupils face. With this knowledge, she arranges tailored support for each pupil to help them overcome their challenges; this enables them to make good progress in their studies and also in their personal development. Teachers and teaching assistants skilfully adapt work to allow pupils to access the work at the right level and challenge them to achieve well. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the progress expected of them. Some pupils, for good medical reasons, miss a significant number of days at school during the year. It is important that they catch up on the work they miss.
- Over many years, the most able pupils at Ilsington have not reached the highest levels of attainment in their writing or mathematics. This trend continues, although it is less marked in mathematics. However, too few pupils are on track to achieve as highly as they can. Leaders have employed a range of strategies to improve standards for this group of pupils. For example, they give pupils a better understanding of the importance of correct punctuation and grammar to improve the readability of their work. Pupils are beginning to include some of what they are being taught in their longer pieces of writing. However, their writing is still not precise enough to secure the high scores. Nonetheless, the most able pupils are making better progress than they have done in the past and their reading remains a strength.
- Pupils enjoy their French lessons. The specialist teacher prepares high-quality lessons which introduce pupils to a wide range of vocabulary. Pupils are confident and talk to each other in the playground using basic conversational French. However, in science, teachers do not have the same in-depth subject knowledge. Consequently, lessons are not as well planned and expectations not as high. The science programme pupils follow can be disjointed, and pupils do not identify the links between what they are learning in science and other parts of the curriculum, such as geography. As a result, pupils do not make progress at the same rate as they do in other areas of the curriculum. Leaders have identified this weakness and have begun to review the curriculum and any training needs to support teachers to deliver high-quality lessons.
- Staff are appropriately trained in a range of risks that pupils may face and leaders regularly update all staff on specific aspects of child protection, such as the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Using this knowledge, staff teach pupils about the risks they may face and how to tackle them. To further enhance this teaching, leaders hold regular assemblies and arrange events to bring these important topics to life. A recent visit to another trust school to watch a production on internet safety and its potential misuse had a demonstrable impact on pupils in key stage 2. Pupils now understand how to use the internet and social media safely. Staff have a good knowledge of pupils and their families. This means that they can be sensitive to and protective of children who may have particular challenges.

- Over recent years, pupils' attendance at school has declined. In part this is due to some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who have medical needs and so require time away from school. However, a number of children have missed part of their education to attend family holidays during the term. This is having a significant impact on rates of attendance. Leaders are quick to follow up any pupil who is absent and make good use of school staff and the education welfare officer to assure themselves that absentees are safe and to encourage better attendance at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching staff continue to improve the outcomes for pupils, especially the most able, to enable them to achieve the highest standards in mathematics and writing
- the quality of the teaching of science across the school improves
- staff continue to monitor closely the attendance of pupils and work with parents to reduce levels of absence.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the trust board, the director of education for the diocese of Exeter, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you joined me to observe learning in classrooms. We looked at a large number of pupils' books covering a wide range of subjects. I heard pupils of differing abilities read.

Meetings were held with senior leaders, the designated leader for safeguarding and three governors. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation and development plan, safeguarding and child protection records, and the school's assessment information.

I spoke with pupils in classes, and at break- and lunch-time to talk about their experience of school, and considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire by 28 pupils. I also took into account the views of 22 parents who responded to Parent View, those who spoke with me at the start of the school day and one letter from a parent.

This short inspection focused on:

- the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics
- the progress boys make in writing
- the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the level of challenge for the most able pupils
- pupils' attendance and their safety.