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Miss Rachel Prior
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Prior

Short inspection of Spaldwick Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your aspirations for this small village school are shared by everyone. The school is a vibrant, happy place. Your vision that 'every day is a chance to learn and succeed', permeates the school, and is seen in the various displays of pupils' work across the curriculum.

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of changes in leadership and teaching staff. You, your deputy headteacher and governors have managed this turbulence well. Teachers new to the profession receive high-quality guidance and support. The leadership team, although enthusiastic, is very new and has only been in place for six months. Consequently, the work of the newest leaders has not yet had time to impact fully on school improvement.

You have created a very positive culture in the school that is appreciated by governors, staff, pupils and parents. Morale is high and staff say they are proud to be members of the school. Since the previous inspection, you and your governors have ensured that teachers have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour, achievement and presentation of work. This has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning, enabling pupils to make better progress from their starting points. This includes the few disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Parents are very positive about the school. The vast majority of parents who provided responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that they would recommend the school. One parent stated that the school, 'fosters an interest in and love of learning', while another commented that pupils, 'have developed and grown, and are loving the Spaldwick journey they are on'.

Pupils told me that they enjoy the variety of sporting and musical opportunities that the school has to offer, as well as the many interesting educational visits. They are proud of the sports award that the school has recently achieved. The 'fruity tooties' spoke enthusiastically about how they organise the school tuck shop. The older pupils clearly explained the 'brain, buddy, boss' system and how this helps them to become more independent and confident learners.

You work effectively with local schools, ensuring a smooth transition for Year 6 pupils to secondary school. For example, during the inspection a Year 7 teacher from a local secondary school visited to teach a literacy lesson to Year 6 pupils. We observed him challenging pupils' thinking while they enthusiastically designed a narrative character.

You are focusing appropriately on improving teaching and learning to raise the standards that pupils reach. Reading is now a strength of the school. In 2016, Year 6 pupils' attainment in reading was well above the national average. However, you recognise that the most able pupils require greater challenge so that they make the best possible progress over time. You also acknowledge that there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their writing and mathematics skills across the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding and the welfare of pupils are of the utmost importance to all staff members and governors at your school. You have successfully created a safe and caring environment in which staff and pupils look out for each other.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and that there are adults to talk to if they have any concerns. All parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are happy, feel safe and are well looked after in your school. One parent commented that children make, 'good progress, in a caring and nurturing environment'.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are organised and detailed. The governors regularly check that safeguarding practice is robust. All staff have received appropriate training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, one of my key lines of enquiry was to investigate pupils' achievements in writing and mathematics. This was because in

2016, the progress Year 6 pupils made in writing and mathematics was significantly below the national average, and in the lowest 10%. Additionally, at the end of key stage 1, no pupils in Year 2 achieved the higher standard in either subject. You and your governors were disappointed with these results and took immediate action. Leaders quickly put effective strategies in place to improve teaching and learning in both writing and mathematics.

- For example, leaders have introduced a daily writing strategy and have ensured that it is used consistently throughout the school. Leaders have found that this has resulted in pupils writing more independently. This in turn has encouraged pupils to use a greater variety of punctuation and vocabulary to write complex sentences. For instance, during the inspection, Year 1 pupils used similes when writing a postcard, and Year 5 pupils produced abstract nouns to improve their sea poems.
- Leaders now ensure that there is a greater focus on developing pupils' calculation and reasoning skills to further develop their mathematical thinking. We observed Year 6 pupils explaining confidently how to work out thought-provoking reasoning calculations. We also saw Year 3 pupils recording their addition and subtraction calculations appropriately.
- These new strategies are enabling all groups of pupils to make expected and better progress in writing and mathematics across the school. The school's latest assessments indicate that a greater proportion of pupils are now working at the expected and higher standards in both subjects in all year groups. However, pupils have too few opportunities to develop their understanding by applying their writing and mathematics skills in other subjects.
- Differences in outcomes between pupils in each year group are diminishing. We saw evidence of this during our learning walks, when looking at pupils' books and analysing school assessment information. The most able pupils do not make the rapid progress that they are capable of because they are not challenged sufficiently. They are given work to do that is too easy and teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough.
- There was a decrease in the proportion of children who reached a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year in 2016. The second line of enquiry explored whether this apparent decline had been halted. Many children start school with skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Children in the Reception class get a flying start to their school life. The stimulating classroom and outside learning environment encourage children to develop their skills both when supported by an adult and when learning independently. The children are provided with many opportunities to practise and develop their mathematical skills and understanding. For example, we saw children making and painting ladybirds while counting and doubling the spots on them.
- Children in the early years are exceptionally keen learners. All groups of children are making good and better progress in their learning because teaching is effective. The work in pupils' books and other assessment information indicates that a higher proportion of children are on track to achieve a good level of development in 2017.

- I looked at the effectiveness of leadership in your school. Experienced leaders understand their roles and responsibilities fully as a result of the high-quality professional development they receive. They have a clear impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes, in their area of responsibility. For example, the special needs coordinator ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points, through effective targeted support.
- You are supporting new leaders well, using local authority expertise as required. You acknowledge that further support is required to ensure new leaders understand their roles and responsibilities fully so that they become highly effective members of the school's leadership team.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider attendance, including persistent absence. This was because in 2016, the absence for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupils eligible for free school meals and girls was very high. You and your staff follow up pupils' absence rigorously and are effective in encouraging all pupils to attend regularly. This academic year, you have improved attendance for all groups of pupils. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has decreased.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils so that a greater proportion make more rapid progress
- pupils are offered more opportunities to develop their writing and mathematics skills across the curriculum to deepen their knowledge and understanding in these subjects
- all subject leaders understand their roles and responsibilities fully so that they are highly effective in leading school improvement in their individual areas of responsibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Harrison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority.

- I spoke with a group of pupils.
- I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the school's self-evaluation.
- I examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils, including the school's single central record of pre-employment checks. I looked at case studies about referrals made to external agencies.
- I visited all classrooms, with the headteacher, to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise the work in pupils' books.
- I took account of the views of 19 staff and 42 parents who responded to Ofsted's online surveys. Parental views from the free-text service were also considered.