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Mr Ian Thomas
Head of School
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Dear Mr Thomas

Short inspection of Pilton Bluecoat Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The chief executive officer, Paul Mulligan, is retiring in two weeks' time. Since the last inspection, he has overseen the establishment of a multi-academy trust called Together Each Achieves More (TEAM). He has been pivotal, through the trust, in helping schools in the local area support and challenge each other to ensure better outcomes for pupils. The trust provides good professional development for staff. Equally, it provides opportunities for the moderation of pupils' work, a vital aspect of current school practice. The trustees have a good understanding of the school and its impact on the locality. The trust's business manager was keen to share the benefits of the holistic education that pupils receive. This was evident as pupils were happy and unfailingly polite to each other, staff and visitors.

You are aware of the chief executive officer's influential work as you were a member of the school's leadership team before gaining wider experience in a neighbouring primary school. You know that the chief executive officer will be sorely missed but are keen to continue his legacy. You are ready to take the reins and lead the school well on its journey forward. Since taking up your post three weeks ago, you have made a secure evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You have devised plans to challenge and support as necessary. The previous head of school and retiring chief executive officer have maintained the strong ethos of the school. They are rightly proud of their achievements.

Pupils of every age follow a curriculum based on an overarching topic, which this

term is China. Dependent on age-related expectations for pupils, work is set around this subject. As a result, pupils learn new facts and acquire a full range of writing skills, year on year. For example, pupils in Year 4 are well versed in persuasive techniques as they write their tourist brochures. Teachers in year groups share planning so that a secure platform of skills underpins adventurous and challenging topics. As one parent commented, 'The school and its staff make big efforts to ensure that the topics are interesting and engaging for the children.' It is your intention to develop not just writing experiences from the curriculum, but mathematical ones, too. These will promote higher-level thinking. Leaders have improved systems for tracking pupils' progress. They allow teachers and teaching assistants to put timely support in place if pupils fall behind in their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have created a culture where assessing risk is the norm. The trust's compliance officer has ensured that checks undertaken on staff, visitors and recruitment are stringent. Secure processes are in place for monitoring and recording any safeguarding concerns. Staff are trained in how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, and from the influence of radical or extreme views. Leaders work sensitively with parents and external agencies to monitor and support any vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- First, we discussed the improvements in mathematics. This was because progress in mathematics has gone from the top 10% nationally in 2016 to the bottom 10% in 2017 in the end-of-year key-stage-2 tests. A new leader of mathematics was appointed in September 2016. She made a careful analysis of the responses pupils made to the tests in 2016 and 2017. She identified that ratio and proportion and geometry are areas that need better teaching. More frequent and systematic teaching of these topics is improving pupils' understanding. Further to this, the leader of mathematics has introduced a new scheme for mathematics that engages pupils in more reasoning and problem-solving, which are necessary skills for the end-of-year tests. Teachers check pupils' capabilities when covering a new concept. This diagnostic assessment means teachers can set work that matches closely to pupils' needs. Many teachers use stepped problems which allow pupils to move on quickly once a skill is learned. As a mathematics leader in your last school, you are aware that progress is being made. However, it needs embedding to secure better outcomes. You value the skills of the mathematics leader and wish to provide her with greater capacity and autonomy to carry out her role effectively.
- Next, we looked at literacy work because progress in reading had dipped in 2017. A highly skilled teaching assistant is teaching phonics. He supports pupils in Year 3 and 4 who entered the school without a suitable grasp of phonics. Alongside this, a higher-level teaching assistant is working with individual pupils to move their reading on rapidly. Together, these two initiatives have been very successful. Pupils' reading ages have improved considerably so that more are at their chronological level. Pupils' vocabulary is widening through reading and there

was clear evidence of this in their writing. There is a new leader in literacy; she is very new to her post. She has a very good understanding of the curriculum, but you are aware she will need support with her leadership skills in the monitoring of colleagues.

- The final aspect we discussed was the challenge for the most able and pupils of middle ability. Too many had not achieved the higher standards in the end-of-key-stage-2 tests. Leaders have made teachers aware of the prior attainment of pupils as they move up from the infant schools. They have raised expectations of what this means with regard to pupils' progress and achievement. The planning of learning caters for the ability range in a more sophisticated way. You are aware that conscientious monitoring will ensure that pupils achieve their maximum potential.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in mathematics and literacy continues to improve, by ensuring that middle leaders have the capacity and skills to monitor the work of teachers, so that progress is more rapid and teaching is consistent
- the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, are provided with challenge to deepen their thinking and reason more proficiently in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi academy trust, 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

Kathy Maddocks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the chief executive officer, the previous head of school, leaders for mathematics and reading, the chair of the governing body and two trustees, staff and pupils. I visited lessons in all year groups in the school, focusing on mathematics and literacy. I looked at the quality of work in pupils' exercise books. I considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including in safeguarding. I took into account 72 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 46 comments written by parents.