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Mr Andrew Leeman  
Headteacher  
Halton Holegate CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Leeman

### **Short inspection of Halton Holegate CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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 November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment in April 2017, you have worked effectively with the local authority and the Diocese of Lincoln. You have addressed head-on the long-standing issues you inherited. For example, prior to your appointment, there had been some considerable changes in staffing, including to leadership. With the support of the KYRA Teaching School Alliance, the diocese and the local authority, you have established a united team of staff and managed necessary improvements well.

Halton Holegate school is a much smaller than average-sized primary school. It is a warm, friendly place to learn. Pupils are well cared for and enjoy their learning. Consequently, they are happy and the vast majority of parents and carers are supportive. For example, a typical parental comment was that the school has, 'a very nurturing and caring environment. The teachers and parents have good communication and feedback.'

Soon after your appointment, you quickly got to know the strengths and areas to develop in the school. You provide strong leadership. You have worked successfully with the local authority to develop appropriate strategic plans for what is required to shape and drive the future of the school. These include improving the curriculum

and environment of the school to better meet the needs of the pupils. For example, you are in the process of developing an outdoor area which pupils will be able to use to relax, be calm and reflect. Additionally, you have ensured that the curriculum is interesting and motivates pupils to learn.

Members of the governing body have benefited from effective training from the Diocese of Lincoln. However, governors do not demonstrate a thorough understanding of their responsibility to hold leaders effectively to account for the use of the additional funding, such as the pupil premium, to improve pupils' outcomes. Consequently, they are unsure if these funds are improving pupils' outcomes as effectively as they could. The governing body reconstituted at the beginning of September 2018. Some governors are new to their roles. Further training is planned to more swiftly improve the effectiveness of the governing body in driving improvements to the school.

The areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have only partially been dealt with due to the significant changes in leadership and staffing. Improved teaching strategies have ensured that pupils apply their mathematical skills to solve a variety of problems. Pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics are improving across the school. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to practise their English skills in extended pieces of writing. They ensure that pupils write for different purposes across a range of different subjects. However, teachers do not reinforce high expectations for the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have created a good culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff and governors benefit from regular training. They are up to date with the current requirements for child protection. They know what to do to keep children safe. You work with families and refer to other agencies in a timely manner. You are persistent in your efforts to ensure that pupils have the appropriate care and support. Staff are vigilant and are prepared to take decisive action to secure pupils' well-being. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say they feel and are kept safe. They say that incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are few but when they do happen staff deal with issues promptly and fairly. Pupils feel well cared for by staff in school and say they can talk to adults about any worries they may have. Typically, they feel the school is like 'another home, everyone knows and can talk to each other. We do fun things. I'm really thankful that I come to this school!' Pupils are taught about the potential risks and how to stay safe in different situations. These include how to use the internet safely, the dangers from strangers and how to ride their bicycles safely on the road.

## Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at the quality of teaching and learning in writing. Since you became headteacher, you have made changes to teaching staff, and classes have been restructured to enable learning to be more focused. You and the senior teacher have worked with the teaching school and local authority to provide teachers with effective support to improve the way writing is taught.
- You have changed the way in which teachers plan to teach writing, so that pupils are motivated to write for a purpose. For example, I saw how pupils have enthusiastically written letters to, and had replies from, significant people and companies across the country, asking them to participate in their work about 'Flat Stanley'. I also saw how Year 6 pupils had used 'The Sea' poem by James Reeves as a stimulus for their descriptive writing. An interesting example was, 'Gracefully, the golden sun was finally awake... cliff roses and the angry sea gazing into my eyes, the sea-birds surrounding me hungrily.'
- Nevertheless, pupils do not attain as highly or make as much progress in writing as they should. Scrutiny of pupils' writing in their books, across a range of subjects and during lessons, showed that teachers' expectations for the quality of pupils' handwriting and the accuracy of their spelling, grammar and punctuation are not high enough. Teachers do not teach pupils to consistently improve their handwriting, nor have they ensured that pupils have grasped a fully basic knowledge and understanding of spelling, punctuation and grammar before moving on to more complex writing skills.
- In January 2018, a new teacher for children in the early years and key stage 1 was appointed. This has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in this class. However, observations of teaching and learning and a scrutiny of pupils' books in Years 1 and 2 show that work is not consistently matched well to pupils' abilities, particularly in English. Too often, pupils struggle to complete writing tasks to the best of their ability because they do not understand the expectations, nor have they acquired the necessary skills.
- The teaching of phonics, although improved, is not as effective as it could be. Pupils are not encouraged to regularly use and apply their phonics skills in their writing to deepen their understanding. This reduces their progress and limits their understanding on how to use phonics when reading and spelling.
- Improving the quality of education for children in the early years has been a priority for the school. You have also ensured that the quality of assessments has improved so that teachers, leaders and governors have a secure understanding of the progress children make from their starting points through the school in different subjects.
- Prior to your appointment there was no suitable outdoor provision for children in the early years. This has now been developed well. Children have regular access to a large outdoor classroom, which encourages them to develop in different areas of learning. You have worked with the teacher and other adults in the early years to ensure that the curriculum inspires children to learn and meets their needs appropriately. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not

consistently good. For example, children do not have sufficient opportunities to develop and practise their skills to challenge their thinking and deepen their understanding.

- Attendance has been below the national average for at least two years. You rigorously monitor the attendance and persistent absence of individual pupils and work well with pupils and their families to promote regular attendance. Consequently, attendance is improving but remains a high priority for the school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics effectively develops pupils' early reading and writing skills
- teachers check that pupils understand and use accurately basic spelling, grammar and punctuation before developing more advanced writing skills
- the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the school
- teachers reinforce consistently high expectations for the quality of pupils' handwriting
- all members of the governing body have the appropriate training to better understand their roles and responsibilities to hold leaders to account for the performance of the school, including for the use of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the leaders for English, the early years and key stage 1. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and I met with a group of pupils. I met with two members of the governing body. You and I visited classrooms together. I looked at a range of pupils' work. We discussed the progress of different groups of pupils and the school's plans for improvement. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. There were no responses to the pupils' and staff surveys. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, procedures and records for safeguarding and behaviour, information on how the pupil premium is spent, an analysis of attendance and

minutes from meetings of the governing body. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.