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Mrs Shirley Whales
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Whales

Short inspection of Northaw Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Northaw Primary School is a welcoming and friendly school. Leaders have worked hard to develop positive relationships with parents and carers. They provide a variety of workshops to inform parents about how they can support their children's learning. Parents welcome the changes that you have made at the school. They value the team's commitment to every pupil's achievement. Typical comments received on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, stated that, 'Every child is made to feel special regardless of ability and all are given a chance to shine,' and, 'A wonderful school with fantastic teachers who are always happy to help and listen.'

Since your appointment in September 2015, you have led the school with strong determination and clear vision. Following a period of staffing turbulence, you have created a stable leadership team. In this small school, leaders work collegiately to improve the school. Leaders are outward-facing and work with other local, small-school leaders to develop their knowledge and skills effectively. All staff welcome the direction you provide, helping them to carry out their roles successfully. All staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire said that they were proud to work at the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They told me that they looked forward to learning different

things every day. They are respectful of one another and say that the school values help them to understand how to work and play together well. All pupils who responded to the inspection survey said that they are all encouraged to treat everyone equally regardless of their background.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning. We observed lessons together. Pupils benefit from positive relationships with adults. They listen to their teachers' instructions so that time is used well for learning. Teachers use a range of different strategies to check pupils' understanding through the lesson. Activities are planned well and designed to stimulate pupils' interests. For example, in a science lesson, pupils were keen to find out about the different parts of the digestive system by placing them on a map of the body.

Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Leaders provide training opportunities to improve their knowledge. Teachers deploy teaching assistants well so that they support different groups effectively. You use their expertise as part of the wider leadership team so that they make a significant contribution to the school's curriculum, such as teaching music or supporting pupils' well-being and mental health.

The school was also asked to make better use of assessment information to help pupils who had gaps in their learning to catch up. Teachers use a consistent assessment system to check on the progress pupils are making. They make plans that identify the support being provided as well as the impact that this should have for pupils' learning. You meet regularly with teachers to discuss the progress of pupils. These pupils are now making stronger progress.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use the information provided by leaders to check on how well the school is improving. However, leaders' plans do not provide timely measures to check the success of actions to improve the school. Therefore, governors are not clear whether the actions taken are on track to achieve leaders' targets. Consequently, the challenge that governors provide is not as rigorous as it should be.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are vigilant for pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and regularly updated about safeguarding matters. Staff who spoke to me know how to recognise signs of concern and record this information. Records about vulnerable pupils are organised well so that information can be accessed quickly to check that actions are taken and agreed support provided. The checks regarding adults' suitability to work with children are thorough and maintained well.

Pupils feel safe in school. They value the guidance they are given to keep themselves safe, for example regular e-safety messages are provided at the start of every computing lesson. Pupils undertake responsibilities that make a good contribution to the wider messages about being safe such as junior travel ambassadors and digital leaders.

Inspection findings

- For my first line of enquiry, I wanted to find out how well governors checked that policies and procedures were working effectively in the school. This is because the school website was not fully compliant with the information that schools are required to publish.
- Governors have a good oversight of safeguarding through regular meetings with leaders and through their own monitoring. They visit the school frequently to scrutinise the checks made on adults who work with pupils. Annual audits carried out by external experts provide valuable information about the school's safeguarding processes and records. During every visit that governors make to the school, there is a check on safeguarding procedures. This means that they are confident that school policies are understood by all staff members. Governors understand how the additional government funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the pupil premium is used to support pupils' progress. They meet with leaders to discuss the impact of plans and hold leaders to account. For example, they know that funding for disadvantaged pupils has been used well to improve their attendance and support their well-being. During the inspection, missing information was placed on the school website so that it is compliant.
- My second line of enquiry focused on how well the most able pupils are challenged at key stage 2. This is because in 2018, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard in mathematics and greater depth in writing was below the national average. Also, pupils who attained greater depth at key stage 1 made less progress compared to pupils with similar starting points nationally.
- You explained that pupils who had recently left the school experienced significant staff turbulence. This had an impact on the progress made by the most able pupils. You acted quickly to establish stable teaching arrangements.
- Teachers use consistent approaches to challenge pupils to think more deeply about their learning. In mathematics, pupils are provided with different challenges so that work is matched to their needs. The most able pupils are given tasks where they apply their skills to solve complex problems such as using algebraic equations in their work. In writing, teachers encourage pupils to use ambitious vocabulary to improve their compositions. Pupils edit their work and produce final pieces that demonstrate fluent and mature writing skills. For reading, leaders ensure that there is a better match of texts to pupils' different abilities. Evidence seen in pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that the most able pupils are making stronger progress in these subjects.
- In some subjects, other than English and mathematics, the most able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. They complete similar work set for all pupils and do not have sufficient opportunity to think harder about their learning. This limits the progress they make in the wider curriculum.
- My third line of enquiry checked how well current pupils made progress in their writing. In 2018, pupils' attainment in both key stages 1 and 2 was below national at the expected standards. The progress pupils made from key stage 1 to key stage 2 was well below the national average.
- Together, we observed the teaching of writing across the school. In the early years provision, carefully planned opportunities provide children with experiences of letter formation. Children use their phonic knowledge well to identify and write initial sounds

for their stories. This means that they get a good start in their development of early writing skills.

- Leaders have worked with staff to improve their skills for the teaching of writing. Teachers show pupils examples of how they can be successful with their own writing. For example, in a key stage 1 class, pupils used the teacher's own model effectively to develop their own descriptions by using a range of adjectives in their writing. Skilful questioning by the teacher probed pupils' understanding of language. Evidence in pupils' English books shows that teachers plan a sequence of learning that helps pupils to write purposefully. Pupils' writing demonstrates high levels of confidence with language to develop their skills in becoming mature writers. However, these skills, especially in punctuation and spelling, are not consistently applied in other subjects.
- Finally, I wanted to investigate how well pupils develop a range of skills through the curriculum. Leaders have designed a rich and engaging curriculum. Your leaders have identified topics that motivate pupils' learning. For example, topics about pirates and space have been introduced to stimulate pupils' interests. There is a well-planned progression of what pupils need to know for their age. Links are made across subjects to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. However, work in pupils' topic and science books shows that pupils carry out similar activities. There are not enough opportunities to challenge the most able pupils. Some teachers do not have the highest expectation of how pupils apply their writing skills in all their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders' plans provide timely measures of success to allow governors to ask probing questions
- teachers have high expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve and consistently set work that stretches and challenges them in subjects other than English and mathematics
- teachers have high expectations of how pupils apply their writing skills across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with the leader of English and the leaders of science and humanities. Together, you and I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I also looked in depth at pupils' workbooks and other work. I spoke with your chosen partner for school improvement. I also spoke by telephone to the deputy director of learning from the Diocese of St Albans. I met with a group of eight boys from Years 4 to 6 to talk about their writing. I also discussed learning with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6.

I considered 48 responses to Parent view, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 25 free-text responses. Consideration was also given to the 36 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 15 responses to the staff survey.

I examined a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and minutes from governors' meetings. I looked at reports provided by your chosen partner for school improvement. I also met with you as designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.