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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jyotsna Chaffey
Headteacher
Thorner's Church of England School, Litton Cheney
Litton Cheney
Dorchester
Dorset
DT2 9AU

Dear Mrs Chaffey

Short inspection of Thorner's Church of England School, Litton Cheney

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019, 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. You and your staff work well together to maintain a school about which one parent typically commented, 'I cannot speak more highly of this school! A wonderful gem.' All the members of staff who responded to the questionnaire expressed similarly positive views, particularly praising your strong leadership. Adults form warm, caring relationships with pupils and have high expectations of their behaviour. Pupils respond very positively, behave extremely well and appreciate the strong teaching and close attention they receive. Pupils across the range of ability, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), enjoy learning and are proud to attend the school.

Governors are highly supportive of the school. They visit the school frequently and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors work effectively with you to secure consistently good teaching and drive improvement. You and your staff work diligently to enlist the full support of the very large majority of parents and to improve attendance so that it matches the national average. With additional assistance from the diocese and local community, you enrich pupils' education across a stimulating range of outdoor sports and environmental learning facilities.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. One of these was to ensure that pupils receive clear guidance on how to improve their work. You were also asked to make sure that the most able pupils in key stage 1 are challenged to improve their writing. Observations of teaching and

learning and a scrutiny of work in books show that pupils know what is expected of them, respect the helpful guidance they receive from adults and work hard to improve. Pupils across key stages 1 and 2 benefit from the teachers' strong focus on extending their vocabulary. This is helping all pupils, including the most able, to improve their descriptive writing. You were also required to improve the expressive arts and design skills of children in Reception. Your strategic decision to take over the pre-school and merge this provision with the Reception class has created a well-equipped and effective early years unit. The increased space now available promotes children's good achievement across all areas of learning. These include children enthusiastically developing their fine motor, art and design skills when cutting and pasting materials to make Chinese dragons.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a clear culture of safeguarding in the school where everyone is committed to securing pupils' welfare. All staff take care to get to know the pupils. This helps staff to provide timely and reassuring assistance when pupils need individual support. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe and are well looked after. A pupil commented, 'The teachers listen to what we say and are quick to help us.' The very large majority of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire or communicated with the inspector fully support this view. One parent typically wrote, 'Our children feel happy and safe at Thorner's.'

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school promotes strong links with community groups and welfare agencies and appropriate referrals are made when needed. Staff know how to use the well-organised systems to report any concerns. Leaders and the school administrator make detailed checks to ensure that all adults working in the school are safe to work with children. Governors assist in checking that this information is kept up to date and fully recorded on the school's single central record. Leaders have drawn up detailed risk assessments to secure pupils' safety and well-being when using the school's wide range of stimulating outdoor learning areas and accessing the adjacent village hall.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders and teachers to improve pupils' progress in reading across key stage 2. You monitor pupils' progress in reading and ensure that pupils receive extra adult assistance should they show signs of 'falling behind'. Pupils make a good start in developing their early reading and phonic skills through early years and key stage 1 classes. You ensure that teachers use assessments of pupils' developing skills effectively to provide the right level of challenge. Teachers provide pupils with reading books that are at the right level for their developing reading ability and which capture their interest. For example, the pupils I heard reading were not put off by books that were too hard, but were encouraged and suitably stretched to tackle new and more complex words.
- Teachers build on pupils' good speaking and listening skills consistently well.

They maintain a similarly strong emphasis on widening and enriching pupils' vocabulary. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 rose well to the challenge of reading and explaining in their own words the meanings of words such as 'impression' and 'generous'. Older pupils in Years 5 and 6, enthused by the novel 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', used their inference skills well to discuss how the author created atmosphere. This is encouraging pupils to explore the books they are reading more thoroughly and deepen their understanding.

- Pupils are challenged to read widely and often, including across the range of subjects and at home. As a result, your latest assessment information accurately confirms that pupils, including the most able, are making strong progress in reading. However, you acknowledge that at times reading records are not sufficiently diagnostic in identifying the words and spellings that pupils found difficult.
- The second line of enquiry examined how effectively leaders and teachers develop pupils' mathematical skills and knowledge. In particular, I considered their work to improve the progress of middle and previously higher-attaining pupils through key stage 2. You promote the pupils' good achievement in mathematics by sustaining clear teaching sequences through which pupils can progress. You maintain a strong focus on systematically developing the pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills, increasingly through real-life problems. You support this by strengthening pupils' basic numeracy and calculation skills. For example, the teacher in Year 2 strengthened the pupils' ability to solve problems using grams and kilograms by additionally reinforcing their understanding of the place value of numbers.
- Pupils say that they enjoy mathematics. Teachers across key stage 2 give pupils, including those most able, challenging tasks. My scrutiny of pupils' books and observations in classrooms showed Year 4 pupils confidently simplifying compound fractions and pupils in Year 5 calculating accurately to two decimal places. Pupils in Year 6 showed their deepened understanding by accurately calculating using ratios. Your current assessments show strong progress in mathematics, with over a third of the pupils showing higher than expected skills for their age. This includes pupils from middle as well as high starting points.
- My final line of enquiry considered how well teachers develop pupils' writing, in particular their ability to spell words accurately. Current pupils' progress information shows that writing standards continue to rise across the school. Teachers model good speaking skills and extend pupils' vocabulary and imaginative writing through the high-quality texts they use. Adults use questioning well to challenge pupils and to deepen their thinking. Pupils are encouraged to write for a purpose and they do so meaningfully across the range of subjects. In response to good teaching, pupils relish explaining their ideas and show an expansive vocabulary when doing so. Pupils across the range of ability, including the most able, transfer these skills well into their expressive writing and construct descriptive sentences, which capture the reader's attention. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 write sentences such as, 'The cute little boy turned around and was face to face with a chameleon.' Similarly, pupils in Years 5 and 6 write with lively turns of phrase such as, 'They ran with a ghost hard on their heels.'

- A scrutiny of the pupils' work shows, however, that the teaching of spelling and handwriting is not given the same priority across the school. Recently, you have been focusing on improving pupils' spelling. There are instances where some pupils are responding well to this work. At present, teachers' expectations are not consistently high. Consequently, on occasions, the pupils' high-quality expressive writing is weakened either by incorrect spelling or poorly formed handwriting.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' spelling and handwriting skills are more consistently taught and developed as they move through the school, including by making better use of reading assessments to tackle weak spelling.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other staff who have leadership responsibilities. I met with the members of the school's governing body and also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms with you and we scrutinised samples of pupils' work. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and observed them reading. I heard selected pupils reading and talked to them about their reading at home and school. I checked a range of documents relating to safeguarding with you and your administrative staff. We also examined details of pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I took account of 43 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and 43 additional written comments from parents. I also took account of one letter and two e-mail messages from parents and considered eight responses to the staff survey and six responses to the pupil survey.