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Mrs Elizabeth Lethbridge
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lethbridge

Short inspection of Harbertonford Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You were appointed when the school joined the Link Academy Trust in April 2016. You quickly recognised the need to secure strong leadership across all areas of the school. In recent years, you have made several staff appointments to strengthen leadership and bring about further improvements. Leaders at all levels share and sustain an ambitious vision for the school. As a team, you promote the school's values of 'live, learn and flourish' by providing a nurturing, caring and inclusive family ethos. Your leadership and your colleagues' work in helping pupils to succeed are appreciated by all those associated with the school. One parent, echoing the views of almost all those who responded to the online questionnaire, wrote: 'I feel really confident that this school has my children's best interests and future development at the heart of everything they do.'

Academy leaders and governors are very supportive of the school. They undertake careful checks to gain an in-depth knowledge of its performance. Your team approach to checking the quality of teaching and learning enables you to identify the right areas for improvement and bring about improvements effectively. Your decision to take over responsibility for managing the nursery has helped you to establish a continuum of effective early years learning. An increasing proportion of children are reaching a good level of development and are well prepared for Year 1. Excellent relationships between adults and pupils and between the pupils

themselves, together with rich learning experiences, promote good learning. The teaching of phonics and reading is highly effective and leads to pupils' good achievement. The inclusive adult support provided for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is a further strength.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including governors and academy directors, ensure that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. School staff sustain a strong culture of safeguarding. For example, they promote close relationships with parents and carers and get to know the pupils well. In response, pupils develop warm and trusting relationships with staff. This helps adults to recognise the signs and symptoms to look out for to keep pupils safe. The arrangements for the recruitment and vetting of staff are of high quality. Leaders maintain detailed records to ensure that staff training, especially in safeguarding, is kept up to date. Staff understand the procedures to follow should they have any concerns that a pupil may be at risk. Leaders check reasons for absence carefully and diligently follow up concerns to keep pupils safe. When appropriate, they communicate supportively with parents and follow correct procedures when referring to social care and other professional services.

Parents are very appreciative of the way that staff care for and look after their children. Typical comments from parents included 'This is a very supportive school where staff clearly care about the well-being of each child.' When questioned, pupils' comments included 'Teachers are very kind and caring towards us and no one is left out.' Pupils show that they are mindful of the needs of others and know how to stay safe and help each other to keep safe. For example, older pupils act as play leaders, helping other pupils at breaktimes. Pupils know how to use computers safely and say, 'We only talk to people we know and can trust.'

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry evaluated the effectiveness of the work of leaders and teachers to improve pupils' achievement in writing. In particular, I considered efforts to improve boys' writing and to increase the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in their writing. Your determined efforts to improve teaching and pupils' progress in writing and to embed consistently high expectations across the school have brought about improvements. This is evident in pupils' enthusiasm for writing and, for example, in their much-neater handwriting and improving spelling. Pupils talk about and explain their ideas for editing and improving their work, for example to express meaning and emotion. Teachers stimulate pupils' positive interest and engagement in learning by using high-quality motivating texts. They also make use of a variety of resources, including dictionaries, thesauruses and word lists, to widen pupils' vocabulary. These initiatives are having a positive impact, especially enthusing boys as successfully as girls. For example, descriptions of the D-Day landings by current pupils in Years 5 and 6 show deeper thinking and writing skills. You remain firmly focused on sustaining this work to improve pupils' spelling and increase the proportion of pupils

attaining higher standards.

- The second line of enquiry considered the degree to which leaders and teachers have been developing pupils' mathematical understanding, particularly for girls. I also checked efforts to increase the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics. With support from colleagues across the multi-academy trust, you and your staff have engaged productively in training to enhance subject knowledge and skills in teaching mathematics. Professional development and sharing of expertise have underpinned your strong whole-school approach to developing pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. Assessment procedures accurately identify pupils' rates of progress and attainment. As a result, pupils are routinely presented with the appropriate levels of challenge for them to make strong progress.
- Your achievement information is accurate and more pupils are now working at the higher standard. Observations of pupils' learning in class show that pupils can solve problems and explain their thinking in ways which demonstrate their deepened understanding. Pupils in the Year 5 and 6 class, girls and boys equally, thoughtfully outlined their strategy for locating coordinates on a grid. Pupils' work in books across the school reflects the improved, and now good progress, of the most able mathematicians. Your improvement plan outlines your continuing drive to increase the proportion of pupils working towards the higher standard.
- My final line of enquiry evaluated the effectiveness of leaders' efforts to establish a curriculum that stimulates pupils' interest and success in learning. Your improvement of the curriculum has been a key element in raising the breadth of pupils' personal and academic outcomes in recent years. Pupils in all classes, including the nursery, benefit from a well-planned range of motivating experiences. Pupils' strong interest in learning is apparent in the way they engage enthusiastically in activities and talk appreciably about their work and achievement. Outdoor learning in the school's woodland area enthuses pupils and contributes to their investigative, art and design skills. One pupil commented excitedly: 'It was fun learning how to make faces out of clay, especially using twigs to add animal or human features – mine was a unicorn!'
- Pupils' good learning and progress are evident in their cross-curricular topic books. Pupils' perceptive descriptions and evaluations of topics such as 'The Big Bang' and 'The Moon Landings' show their deepened scientific thinking and understanding. This work also shows the pupils' careful presentation, pride in their work and improving writing skills, for both boys and girls. Parents noted the positive and wide range of learning experiences provided for the pupils in and out of doors. One parent typically referred to 'great strides in improvements that have benefited the children, such as the forest school, outdoor classroom, physical education and range of clubs offered'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strengthened teaching of writing is sustained to further develop pupils' skills, particularly in spelling, and to raise the proportion achieving higher standards at the end of key stage 2
- the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in mathematics, particularly in their reasoning and problem-solving, continues to increase.

I am copying this letter to the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of The Link 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

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 local board and the chief executive officer of the Link multi-academy trust. I visited classrooms with you and we collected and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and observed them reading and checking their work. I listened to selected pupils reading and talked with them about their reading at home and at 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 17 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and eight additional written comments from parents. I also took account of 10 responses to the staff survey and 11 responses to the pupil survey.