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Paul Fox
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fox

Short inspection of St Michael's Church of England School, Louth

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2016, 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have sustained the strengths noted at that inspection. The pupils continue to make good progress in the school's calm, warm and understanding environment. You and the governing body have made sure that the pupils benefit from a broad curriculum, which provides effectively for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school has, understandably, substantially gained the confidence of parents.

You have dealt effectively with the areas for improvement set out in the report from the last inspection. Subject leaders have more opportunities now to support their colleagues' development. You have provided time for them to carry out their functions. The subject leaders are undertaking activities, such as scrutinising the pupils' work, which they were not doing five years ago. As a result, they and you are better informed about how well the pupils are doing than was the case back in 2011. That is leading in turn to actions for improving the school which are focused on appropriate priorities.

The subject leaders have worked successfully to improve the teachers' skills in questioning pupils. Better questioning has, in turn, helped to improve the pupils' speaking skills and meant that the level of challenge provided to the pupils, including the most able, has increased. The standard and presentation of the pupils' work have also improved.

The governing body is more effective now than it was at the time of the last inspection. It is more active in checking on the things that the school does. It is more influential in prompting you and the senior leaders to take action to improve things that the governing body does not think are good enough. For example, the school has improved pupils' results in the Year 1 phonics screening check, after the governing body looked into the matter.

According to the latest, though as yet unconfirmed, information about the pupils' achievement in 2016, the pupils in key stage 1 did not do as well as they have in previous years. In particular, the information suggests that the most-able pupils did not do as well as they could have. You have acted quickly to identify the cause of the problem and taken appropriate action, though the improvements are still recent.

You have improved the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in some notable respects. Importantly, you have reduced the difference between their achievement and that of other pupils noticeably. Nevertheless, some differences remain and you and the governing body have not, until very recently, evaluated in much depth how effectively you have used the pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The governing body and leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that appropriate and detailed records are kept. The records of checks made on staff, volunteers and others who work at the school, of pupil admissions to the school and of daily attendance by the pupils are maintained carefully.

The school's systems for the staff to report any concerns are clear and straightforward. The school works well with external agencies to get additional support for pupils, when necessary, and the leaders at the school show initiative in providing what the pupils need.

The staff undertake suitable training and are kept up to date with changes in government guidance and regarding specific matters relevant to the pupils at the school. Consequently, they are alert to the sorts of things for which they need to keep a look-out and know about the needs of individual pupils in their care. They know how and to whom to report any concerns that they may have.

You have improved the pupils' attendance well. You take direct action to deal with poor attendance and are prepared to challenge it, even when to do so is unpopular with parents.

The pupils feel safe and happy at the school. They talk readily about, and with a good level of understanding of, the school's 'golden rules'. The rules make an important contribution to the pupils' sense of well-being and security. The pupils develop sensible attitudes to keeping themselves safe because the school teaches them about such things as road safety, staying safe online and when using social media and texts.

Inspection findings

- You, the leaders at the school and the governing body work constantly and to good effect to identify things at the school that need improving, or that you want to be better than they are. You set suitable priorities for making improvements and then you get on with the job. I found clear evidence of successful work since the last inspection and of well-judged action currently to improve the school.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check increased markedly in 2016. The school is now above average.
- The improvement in phonics was particularly large among disadvantaged pupils. A previous decline in the scores for those pupils was reversed to such an extent that disadvantaged pupils did better than others for the first time.
- You identified quickly that problems with the pupils' achievement in key stage 1 in 2016 were the result of inaccurate assessments by the teachers because of some misunderstandings and confusion about changes to the ways in which pupils are assessed. In particular, the assessments did not pick up accurately on the levels at which the most able pupils were working. Consequently, you have taken action this academic year to improve the accuracy of the teachers' assessments.
- The work in the books of the most-able pupils in key stage 1 currently shows that they are making clear gains in writing and in mathematics.
- Those pupils, including those among them who are disadvantaged, read competently and with confidence and are quite prepared to attempt to read difficult words.
- Some of those pupils are prone to making errors by rushing and they do not always use their knowledge of phonics as well as they might, in order to avoid making errors; they do use that knowledge successfully to correct errors that they have made, when reminded to do so.
- The most able pupils are given work in lessons that is appropriately demanding. They focus and concentrate well in lessons. I found no evidence of them being bored, or feeling unchallenged by the work that they had been given.
- The teachers provide helpful opportunities for the most able pupils to move on quickly to more difficult work when the pupils are ready. I saw pupils doing so with palpable interest, wanting to learn more.
- You make other arrangements that allow the most able pupils to learn at a level for which they are ready, rather than being restricted simply by their chronological age.
- The pupils' workbooks show that they pay attention to what they are supposed to be learning and take care in producing their work.
- The pupils are provided with frequent and helpful feedback, both during lessons and about the work that they have produced. The teachers push the pupils routinely to think more, to extend their answers, and to correct mistakes. This supports steady and secure progress by the pupils.
- The most-able pupils develop independence and persistence in their approaches and attitudes to learning. I found little evidence, however, that the most-able pupils are provided with much by way of additional support in lessons by adults to make sure, for example, that the most-able readers are working with sufficiently challenging reading material.

- Disadvantaged pupils at the school are catching up with and, in some aspects of learning, starting to do better than their non-disadvantaged peers. Where differences remain, they are not usually wide.
- The teachers are well aware of which pupils are disadvantaged. They have a good understanding of how each of the pupils is doing.
- The disadvantaged pupils learn alongside and as effectively as their peers in lessons.
- The most-able disadvantaged pupils benefit as much as their peers from the general support provided for the most able. I found little evidence, however, of anything beyond that to deal with any particular barriers to learning that the most-able disadvantaged pupils may face.
- The school has not evaluated with much rigour the impact of the uses that it has made of the pupil premium. In particular, it has not established whether the expenditure to support staffing benefits the disadvantaged pupils in particular, or not, so that their specific needs are not just caught up in the general mix. I acknowledge that you began work before this inspection to look much more closely at this particular matter.
- The school encourages reading effectively. The pupils express enjoyment of and interest in reading a range of different types of texts.
- The teachers make regular checks on how well the pupils are reading. They change the books that the pupils are asked to read, based upon what they learn from the checks. Pupils who are experiencing difficulties with reading are identified quickly and the teachers respond by switching the pupils to more-appropriate texts.
- You have recently increased the emphasis on pupils reading outside of school. This is proving helpful particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The pupils know well what is expected of them in terms of reading at home.
- The pupils' attendance is currently at a four-year high and, for the first time in that period, slightly above the latest-known national average.
- The school has reduced the difference between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils well. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still lower than that of other pupils, but by a small margin.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent improvements in the assessment of the pupils in key stage 1 are secured, so that the most able pupils are consistently able fully to work at the levels of which they are capable
- additional staffing paid for using the pupil premium is used to full effect in meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able.

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

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with: the headteacher; the designated leader for safeguarding; and other teachers. I met with representatives of the governing body. I made a series of visits to lessons jointly with the headteacher. I listened to pupils reading. I discussed the work of the school with the pupils formally, when meeting with them, and informally during breaks and in lessons. I looked at the pupils' work during lessons and scrutinised a sample of their workbooks. I looked at the views of parents expressed using Parent View and others collected through surveys carried out by the school. I talked with parents at the start of the school day. I looked at the results of inspection surveys of the pupils and the staff. I looked at a range of documents, including records of support provided to the pupils, safeguarding records, a range of policy documents, and other information about behaviour and attendance. I looked into the progress of pupils in key stage 1 and the support provided for the most-able pupils, the impact of the support provided for disadvantaged pupils, the effectiveness of the school's work to promote good attendance, and the effectiveness of the school's work to safeguard pupils. The information on the school's website complies with the requirements.