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Mrs J Knox  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Knox

### **Short inspection of Houghton-on the-Hill Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 January 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 April 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and the school is continuing to improve. Teachers are brimming with enthusiasm and expectancy regarding the developments currently taking place within the curriculum, and this is largely due to the example set by you and your deputy headteacher. Your skills are also valued beyond the school gate, with the teaching schools alliance using you and your team to support other schools directly, and through the delivery of training which has been well researched in your own setting. In discussions with school leaders and governors, there is an absolute commitment to the development of mastery in pupils' learning. As a result, pupils' knowledge and learning are well developed and applicable to a wide range of subjects and situations. Pupils I spoke to from Year 5 told me that there was always another work challenge around the corner when they completed a task and that their learning was stoking their ambitions for when they entered the world of work. Parents I spoke to at the start of the day were full of praise for the school's values, one stating with pride, "You can always tell a Houghton child."

Leaders and governors have acted effectively on the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. Outcomes in the early years have improved annually and this reflects improvements in the quality of planning and provision for learning activities indoors and outdoors.

Steps to improve the range and opportunities for pupils' writing have resulted in improved outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1. Work in writing books shows that pupils in Key Stage 2 are making strong progress this year. Work in other books shows that many of the skills learned in literacy and mathematics are transferred to, and practised in, other subjects, although this is not yet fully embedded across the school. There is an increasingly consistent use of feedback to pupils on how to improve their work further in English and mathematics, but this is not yet fully supported by effective and manageable assessment procedures in other subjects.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors place a high priority on keeping children safe. Year 5 pupils talk confidently about the measures taken to keep them safe from harm in an environment that is awash with reminders about the school's values. At every turn, there are references to the fundamental British values of respect and tolerance, and pupils talk about how they live these values both inside and outside the school environment. They value the increasing roles of responsibility that come with age and take these very seriously as the oldest pupils in the school. Parents spoken to were unanimous that their children were safe and this view is endorsed by the vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View. Pupils are confident that any adult in school will help them, should the need arise, but are equally sure that incidents of bullying and name-calling are rare. Where there have been any instances in the past, you have comprehensive documentation to show that you took decisive action, in line with statutory and school policies.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and records are detailed. You are also able to show that leaders analyse incident records, along with the responses from the pupils' biennial survey, to ensure that the school does not become complacent about safety. Staff and governors undertake regular safeguarding training and this is supported by clear and effective policies.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further development. There is a comprehensive plan for school improvement, with governors asking challenging questions of you to ensure its implementation and to check on its impact. Governors are clear about their roles and the importance of strong governance in driving school improvement. There are regular skills audits to ensure that there is a good balance of backgrounds available to help make decisions about the school. Parents are encouraged to add their views to the future direction of the school through open meetings. This is particularly relevant at the present time as the school is due to expand to include Year 6 pupils from 2017. There is a well-established

committee structure within the governing body and governors are clear about the remit of each.

- On some occasions, not enough of the work of each committee is shared with the full governing body and this results in some gaps in governors' knowledge of the school as a whole.
- The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school, with many keen to speak to me to provide a real flavour of its strengths. Parents are almost entirely positive about their children's educational achievement and preparation for the next stage of their education. Those who have made the decision to choose this school for their child despite having to travel some distance, talk of the impact of the school's inclusive approach on the lives of their children and families. Parents believe that the level of care and support is of consistently high quality. They see communication with the staff of the school as being a strength which helps to ensure that any issues are addressed in a timely fashion. Where parents have indicated their dissatisfaction with the school, this appears to have been in connection with specific and individual issues. These are few and are not representative of the findings of the inspection.
- Leaders review the progress of each pupil regularly through lesson observations, work scrutiny and ongoing assessment. Teachers are expected to come to termly meetings about the progress of each child with comprehensive details about the impact of their teaching. You and your leadership team analyse this information and work with teachers to improve outcomes still further. A good example of this was seen in the early years, where baseline information about children has been used to direct additional teaching and resources towards the development of moving and handling skills. This action is helping children to develop the skills required to improve their writing, with evidence of success seen in their writing books.
- Leaders and governors review internal and published data regularly and recognise that there have been some inconsistencies in pupils' outcomes over time. They have rightly identified these as requiring attention within the school's plans for improvement, with evidence showing that improvements have been effective. Children typically enter the early years at levels of development which are in line with those expected nationally. In 2015, a higher than average proportion left the early years having achieved a good level of development. By the end of Year 1, an increasing number achieve the standard expected in the national phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) screening test and this now exceeds the national average. At the end of Key Stage 1, in 2015, greater than average proportions of pupils reached higher levels of attainment in reading, writing and, particularly mathematics. I took particular interest in the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2 as, without a Year 6 class, there is no published data for this key stage. Again, there was compelling

evidence in books to show that pupils are making progress which is at least good in writing and mathematics, over time.

- The work being done by teachers to develop pupils' mastery of reading, writing and mathematics is having a very positive impact on learning in these subjects. Teachers and leaders have taken time to research and analyse the factors behind these successful teaching strategies. They have identified that, in subjects such as science, history and geography, teachers' assessment is not as well developed. This results in teachers' understanding of pupils' next steps in learning being less precise. As a result, pupils' progress is less strong. You agree that the development of effective assessment in all subjects is a vital next step in ensuring that the impact of teaching and learning is consistent across the curriculum.
- Pupils behave well around the school and at different times of the day. By Year 5, they are able to have well-developed conversations about what they have learned, while expressing mature and well-informed opinions. These pupils are well prepared academically and socially for the next stage in their education. In lessons, pupils are engaged in their work and eager to do their best, displaying enthusiastic attitudes to learning. Pupil attendance is consistently average or above, and families are punctual at the start of each day.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' outcomes continue to improve by:
  - spreading the already very successful and strong practice seen in writing and mathematics across the rest of the curriculum
  - ensuring that assessment practices and procedures for all subjects are as effective and accurate as they are for literacy and mathematics.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met you, subject leaders, four governors, parents and the pupils from Year 5. I considered responses of parents from Parent View, a telephone call with a parent and an email from another. We visited all classes in the school, spending a short time in each, and looked at a sample of pupils' work together. I looked at a range of documents including an evaluation of the school's performance and plans for further improvement, information on how the pupil premium is spent and a number of policy documents, including those for child protection and special educational needs.