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Mrs Janine Burton
Headteacher
Himbleton Church of England First School
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Dear Mrs Burton

Short inspection of Himbleton Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

There has been significant turbulence in staffing since the last inspection. Recently, you have appointed a new teacher to the early years and have employed a long-term supply teacher in the Years 1 and 2 class to cover a maternity leave. In addition, there have been periods of time when the school has been without a headteacher, both through the illness of the previous headteacher and a period of a term before you took up your post in April 2015. You and the governors have managed these situations well and have ensured that there has been minimal disruption for the pupils.

You have set out a clear plan to improve the school to 'outstanding' over the next three years. The staff and governors share this ambition and there is a tangible focus on continuous improvement. Your school development plan is sharp and precise and provides a detailed pathway for leaders and governors to follow. There is a sense of urgency about the pace of improvement.

You quickly identified areas of weakness in the school, for example that the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) was weak. As a result of training, new resources and a consistent and well-organised method for teaching phonics, this has improved. The leader you appointed to this area of school is

knowledgeable and effective in her role and the proportion of pupils on track to meet the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check is considerably higher than in the past. Progress in reading is strong and pupils have access to a wide range of books that interest them. In addition, the introduction of tablet computers and the upgrading of the internet infrastructure have opened up a new world of online reading and research for pupils.

The previous inspection report identified that pupils should understand the learning outcomes of lessons and have opportunities to improve their own work. These issues have been fully addressed. For example, pupils correct and edit their own work using a 'purple polishing pen'. They were proud to show me examples of this and how they had improved their own writing.

The school is a busy, purposeful and caring place that is focused on learning. Pupils are polite and friendly and are welcoming to visitors. They care about one another and about the adults that look after them. One governor summed this up, saying, 'our school feels like a family'. The school environment is well ordered and tidy and the displays provide pupils with support and ideas to help them with their learning, as well as showing off their work. Adults have a good understanding of what pupils can and cannot do and plan their learning activities accordingly. This supports pupils to make good progress. The school grounds have been very well developed to provide pupils with a wide variety of interesting places in which to learn and play, including a 'forest studies' area, a spiritual garden, a pond area and a range of games marked out on the playground. Pupils use these spaces well because routines and rules are well embedded and expectations of behaviour are high. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is a strength of this school.

Since taking up post, you have encouraged staff to allow pupils to be more involved in their own learning and to integrate computing and technology into their lessons. This has been successful and pupils thrive on being able to make decisions about their own learning, for example when they use 'The Mantle of the Expert'. In addition, parents spoke positively about the new electronic systems you have introduced to enable parents to find out about their children's learning.

Overall, pupils make good progress at Himbleton Church of England First School, particularly so in reading. You are aware that some weaknesses exist in the teaching of mathematics and are taking appropriate steps to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

You rightly place the highest priority on keeping pupils safe. Staff are recruited safely. They are well trained and alert to the signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Your policies and procedures for reporting concerns are thorough and clear. All staff understand them. When concerns are raised, they are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Detailed records are kept.

Pupils feel safe at school and have confidence that adults will listen to their concerns, take them seriously and take appropriate action. Parents also have confidence that you take good care of their children and keep them safe. Pupils

learn how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, for example when they use the internet.

Inspection findings

- Your leadership is effective. You are very clear about the improvements you want to make and the actions that you will take to secure them. You have identified these improvement areas from your accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You have high expectations of yourself, staff, governors and pupils and have driven improvements thus far with energy and enthusiasm. You provide appropriate training and support and link with other local schools effectively in order to support staff to improve their practice.
- Himbleton is a small school and you have been effective in empowering teachers in charge of subject areas to lead improvements. This increases your capacity to improve the school. For example, the mathematics leader and the phonics leader have both implemented a range of initiatives that are having a positive impact on improving pupils' progress. However, they have not yet fully monitored the effectiveness of these actions.
- Good progress in writing is evident in pupils' workbooks. This is in part because pupils have lots of opportunities to practise, both in English lessons and in other subjects. Work is presented neatly. Teachers have high expectations, and marking and verbal feedback helps pupils to improve their work. You are aware that the lower ability pupils in Years 3 and 4 need additional support to make up for previous lost ground in their spelling knowledge. They did not benefit from the current effective phonics teaching and have gaps in their learning. This can be seen in pupils' workbooks, where they regularly spell 'high-frequency' words such as 'said' and 'where' incorrectly.
- In 2015, the overall proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception Year was in line with the national figure. This is set to improve this year. Teaching in the early years is effective. The environment is stimulating and engaging and this is supporting children to make better progress than in the past. At the end of Year 2, in 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was well above the national average in reading and in line with this measure in writing and mathematics. You keep a close eye on the progress of the small number of disadvantaged pupils to ensure that their progress is as good, if not better, than that of their classmates.
- Together with governors, you rightly identified that, in the past, governance has not been strong enough. Governance was characterised by support rather than challenge. Working in partnership with the governors, you and the local authority have provided a range of training that has enabled the governors to better understand their roles and purpose. The balance between support and challenge is improving, although governors acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that they are fully effective in their roles. For example, governors' checks on the work of the school do not yet focus on the priorities set out in the school development plan. Nonetheless, governors are highly committed to and fully involved in the life of the school. They are judicious in the use of funding and understand what needs improving in the school.
- You have correctly identified that there is work to be done to improve the teaching of mathematics. The subject leader has ensured that the expectations

of the new curriculum are understood by staff and that gaps in pupils' knowledge, as a result of the introduction of this new curriculum, are filled. However, you are aware that pupils are not always moved on to more demanding work as soon as they are able. Pupils' workbooks show that they sometimes have to complete a large number of the same type of calculation before they move on to apply this learning in a new and more challenging way.

- You have successfully introduced a system for tracking pupils' attainment, and are using this to identify individuals and groups of pupils who need to catch up in their learning. This is being used to keep governors well informed. The system you are using to track pupils' progress, however, is not yet as advanced as that for tracking attainment. As a result, it is not easy for governors to understand the rates of pupils' progress.
- The curriculum is well organised. There is a good balance between the faith-based teaching and ensuring that pupils develop knowledge about, and respect for, people from different faiths and those with no faith. Pupils' religious education books show that they regularly learn about values such as respect, forgiveness and honesty and about the major world faiths, comparing and contrasting them with Christian beliefs. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- All pupils participate in 'forest studies' and experience a range of educational visits and after-school clubs. These are enjoyed and appreciated by the pupils and contribute well to their personal and cultural development. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their above-average attendance.
- Classrooms are busy and purposeful places. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at making regular checks throughout lessons to ensure that pupils understand their tasks and are able to get on with their learning. They are quick to pick up pupils' misconceptions and mistakes and correct them through careful questioning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the system for tracking pupils' progress is refined to enable the governors to receive the same level of detail about pupils' progress as they do about pupils' attainment
- subject leaders have opportunities to monitor fully the impact of their work
- monitoring activities carried out by governors are more sharply focused on the priorities set out in the school development plan
- pupils are moved on to more challenging work in mathematics as soon as they are ready
- the lower ability pupils in key stage 2 are supported to fill the gaps in their knowledge of 'tricky words'.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Worcester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

In order to discuss how well pupils are progressing and to verify the improvement work that has taken place since the last inspection, I met with you and the subject leaders for mathematics and English. I met with four representatives of the governing body. I also spoke to an officer from the local authority on the telephone. I visited lessons to observe pupils' learning and look at their work. I spoke with parents at the end of the school day and took into consideration a recent parents' survey undertaken by the school. I analysed 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation, along with a range of other documents, and checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements.