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1 July 2016

Mrs Rosie Browne
Acting Headteacher
Old Dalby Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Browne

Short inspection of Old Dalby Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection of the predecessor school. With the support of the governing body, you have sustained the school's strong, caring ethos, but have not sacrificed in any way a clear ambition for the pupils to achieve well academically. The pupils' achievement is good and has improved gradually over the last few years in the early years and at both key stages. Differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared with that of other pupils who are not disadvantaged have reduced well, so that these pupils make progress very similar to that of other pupils.

You have ensured that the school is outward looking. You exploit opportunities to learn from other schools well. The impact of that is evident in the successful developments your leadership team has introduced into the curriculum and in the work that you are carrying out to develop the ways in which you assess the pupils' learning.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that emphasises the importance of literacy and numeracy, but with some imaginative and even innovative approaches, which enable you to succeed in your intention to inspire and to excite the pupils. The topics and activities chosen and devised by the staff invest

lessons and various other learning activities at the school with a sense of energy and, to use your own word, a buzz.

The emphasis on literacy and numeracy has not been at the expense of broader aspects of learning. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and opportunities for them to learn about fundamental British values have been woven through the curriculum, so that the curriculum reflects very well the school's core values. The result is to be found in the pupils, who feel happy and safe at the school, enjoy learning and develop well as confident young citizens, with well-balanced attitudes to life. You spoke to me with justifiable pride about the pupils' many charitable activities, which are often initiated by the pupils themselves.

The school offers a well-cared-for, welcoming, stimulating and vibrant environment, highly conducive to learning, indoors and out. It is a nice place to be and contributes importantly to the pupils' sense of well-being, to their positive attitudes and, consequently, good behaviour.

You have put considerable efforts into creating a curriculum that provides many and varied opportunities for the pupils to develop their writing skills. This was something picked out at the last inspection of your predecessor school as needing improvement.

Notwithstanding the improvements that you have made, challenges remain. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is not sufficient currently to eliminate the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils by the end of key stage 2. Also, you have not completed your work to put in place ways of assessing pupils' progress. The different approaches that you use currently do not provide you with the clearest and most useful information possible, which gets in your way at times, when you are trying to work out how high to set expectations of and challenges for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You provide regular and frequent training for the staff, including most recently, for example, training in combating radicalisation, which ensures that the staff are aware of the different types of safeguarding concerns and can identify potential issues. The staff operate the school's systems dutifully for alerting senior colleagues to any such issues.

Members of staff designated with responsibility for safeguarding know intimately and can explain in detail the cases when individual pupils have needed additional support. You show initiative in working with outside agencies to get appropriate support for pupils, when it is needed. Your approach is careful, considered, thoughtful and persistent, although not always meticulous in every detail of your record-keeping.

The pupils are encouraged, successfully, to care for each other. I witnessed, for example, the work of the 'peace pals', who responded very quickly to anyone using the 'buddy bench' in the playground, to make sure that nothing was wrong and that anyone who needed help got it. The peace pals understood their responsibility for looking after other pupils and spoke knowledgeably about how to help others, including getting the staff involved, if need be.

The staff have the confidence of pupils. The pupils told me that they feel very safe at the school. All of the parents with whom I spoke and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) confirmed that their children feel safe. Pupils' attendance has improved notably and consistently over the last few years, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, although these pupils still do not attend as well as others. The school offers support to the few families whose children experience difficulties with attendance, so that the children's learning is affected as little as possible, although the school finds it difficult sometimes to ensure that the support is taken up.

Inspection findings

You have worked effectively to sustain progress at the school at a time when difficulties with leadership capacity have had an impact on staffing arrangements. Despite the difficulties and the uncertainty that they bring (a legitimate concern for a small number of parents with whom I spoke, or who provided comments through the online survey), you have kept the staff focused on, committed to and effective in maintaining a good quality of teaching and improving the school.

The pupils continue to make good progress, including those who are disadvantaged. Most recently, you have exceeded the government's floor standards for pupils' achievement convincingly, with all pupils making at least expected progress, including pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

Nevertheless, disadvantaged pupils are still not reaching the same standards as others by the end of key stage 2.

The governing body has ensured that the things on which you spend the pupil premium, which is intended to help you to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils, are legitimate. It has not ensured, however, that you have evaluated rigorously which of those things brings most benefit to pupils. As a result, you are unable to make well-informed decisions about future spending, so that it can support the work that you still need to do in enabling pupils to make even more progress than they do currently.

The provision for children from service families ensures that, overall, they make good progress during their time at the school.

The teachers attend well to the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. They make effective arrangements that enable those pupils to learn alongside their classmates, or to receive separate, additional support with particular aspects of learning, when the teachers' assessments show that it would be beneficial. As a result, at times, these pupils make better progress than others at the school.

Increasingly, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at key stage 1 is catching up with that of other pupils.

I saw considerable evidence of imaginative and, occasionally, innovative work to promote writing, led capably, knowledgeably and with vigour by the literacy coordinator. The stress placed by the school on the importance of writing is captured graphically in a display in the school's main reception area with a wonderful model of a giant fountain pen, made by a member of staff.

The success of the work to improve writing was apparent in the clear progress evident in pupils' work, including for boys. The work begins successfully in the early years.

The imaginations of the boys with whom I spoke, including those from service families, have manifestly been fired by the well-chosen topics and activities, such as 'exciting writing'. The changes have resulted in much more positive attitudes to writing among boys than previously; boys whom the school has identified as 'reluctant writers' are increasingly making greater efforts with their writing than they were.

The boys spoke animatedly and knowledgeably, for example about work that they have been doing on global warming. They spoke convincingly about how the changes in the curriculum have increased their interest in writing and not just in the content of their work, but also the technical side. They are able to explain in detail how they have improved, for example, their use of punctuation, such as colons and semi-colons, and make better use of what they called 'hard' words, such as 'despicable' and 'mysterious'.

The teachers use a range of effective techniques that have a markedly positive effect on how well pupils understand the things that they have to learn. For example, pupils get opportunities at times to make decisions about how they can do things, which makes them very alert to what is required.

The literacy coordinator makes good use of information about pupils' progress in writing to identify individuals who are not making expected progress and then to work with the class teachers to arrange additional support for these individuals. The additional support results in substantial gains in learning about particular aspects of writing in relatively short spaces of time.

The school's approach to assessment is less successful at the moment in helping the staff to work out what more needs to be done for pupils who are making expected progress, but who need to make even greater gains if their attainment is to catch up with their peers, than it is in identifying pupils who may be falling behind. Nevertheless, you have been successful in getting consistent practice among the staff in assessing pupils' work.

The comments that teachers give to pupils about their writing are effective in helping pupils to correct mistakes. Typically, pupils do not repeat mistakes after they have made corrections.

Writing is not the only area of the curriculum that has been developed effectively. Your approach to teaching mathematics means that the teachers grab the pupils' attention and so pupils are well motivated towards the learning and, subsequently, remember that learning.

Pupils' behaviour is good. That does not mean that they never misbehave, but incidents of serious misbehaviour, including bullying, are rare.

Pupils have a good sense of right and wrong. They told me that, occasionally, they hear homophobic language being used, but they know that it is unacceptable and dealt with swiftly by staff.

Pupils respond well to the school's rewards system. They are motivated considerably by things such as 'Dalby dollars' and how the collection of the dollars is recorded in a corridor display by individual racing cars positioned around a circuit.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils make more progress than they do currently, in order to catch up with other pupils' attainment by the end of key stage 2
- the ways in which the school uses additional funding for disadvantaged pupils are evaluated incisively, so that the school knows which things have most impact for the pupils, in order to reduce the difference in attainment at the end of key stage 2
- the development of the school's approach to assessing pupils' progress is completed, so that the school has the best information possible to support teachers in increasing the progress made by pupils.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with the acting headteacher, the chair of the governing body, who is also responsible for safeguarding, and the governor responsible for provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability, the designated persons responsible for safeguarding, and with the literacy coordinator. I made a series of visits to lessons jointly with the acting headteacher. I examined examples of pupils' work and looked at teachers' assessments of that work. I held a range of discussions with a wide variety of pupils, informally when observing breaktimes and during lessons, and formally with a group of pupils, including children from service families. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school at the start of the day, at breaktimes and during lessons. I met with parents at the beginning of the school day, looked at the views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and other information about parents' views collected by the school. I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, behaviour policies, the latest achievement information for the school, including the school's data, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation summary, records of meetings of the governing body, and information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.