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8 December 2016

Mrs Carol Gunn-Smith
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Dear Mrs Gunn-Smith

Short inspection of Ilam CofE (VA) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 successfully addressed the recommendation from the last inspection to ensure that pupils have more opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects. You have also ensured that activities are more accurately matched to the different abilities and ages of the pupils in the mixed-age classes.

You have ensured that there is an extremely strong sense of togetherness in this small school. Pupils appreciate the fact that everyone knows and looks after everyone else. One pupil's comment, that 'We're like a family but with rather a lot of children,' was representative of the views of parents and pupils alike.

You have made sure that the school is very much at the heart of the village and local community. Pupils are provided with excellent opportunities to develop an appreciation of the unique rural area where they live. Learning outside the classroom is now an established part of school life for all pupils and offers them challenging opportunities, both physically and to support their learning across the curriculum.

You have been effective in ensuring that pupils are reflective individuals who develop an understanding of the beliefs and cultures of other people, both in their own country and across the world. Visits to places of worship and links with pupils in other schools are well established, and support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and

cultural development. While pupils are respectful and tolerant of other people, they are less secure in their understanding that these are fundamental values within British society.

Pupils continue to behave well. They know that they have a responsibility for their own behaviour and this is demonstrated in the positive attitudes that they show towards their learning and the high standards of behaviour that are seen, both in classrooms and at breaktime and lunchtime. Pupils are polite, well mannered and show a pride in their school.

Outcomes for pupils have generally been good since the last inspection. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and leave with standards that are generally above those that are expected for their age. This is the result of good teaching that is closely matched to the abilities of the different pupils. You have ensured that teachers understand the need to plan and teach activities that are suited to different abilities and ages.

In 2014 and in 2015 pupils made good progress from their different starting points in key stage 1 and key stage 2 and achieved outcomes that were above the national average. The very small number of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieved as well as their peers. The most recent national assessment information indicates that, in 2016, pupils in Year 6 made good progress from their starting points in writing. However, progress was not as strong in reading and mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards was above the national average in both reading and writing but was below in mathematics. You recognise that while core skills are taught thoroughly and well in mathematics, there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in reasoning and problem solving.

Outcomes vary from year to year due to the very small number of pupils in year groups and the impact that the attainment and progress of an individual pupil can have on the school's overall performance information. In 2016, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth at key stage 1 or at the higher levels in key stage 2 was below the national average. You, together with teachers and governors, are aware that outcomes for the most able pupils need to be higher and have identified a range of strategies to ensure that expectations for these pupils are consistently high. However, these approaches are not yet fully embedded and it is too early to identify the impact on outcomes for the most able pupils in school.

The governing body provides effective support and challenge for you as the headteacher. They have been proactive in reviewing their effectiveness and commissioned an external consultant to identify how they could further improve their impact on ensuring that all pupils achieve high outcomes. This has led to an effective sub-committee structure, with different governors having a detailed knowledge of specific aspects of the school's work. Systems to ensure that information gathered through governors' monitoring are shared across the whole governing body work well and ensure that governors have a strong understanding of strengths and any weaknesses within school. Governors recognise that there is a

need to strike a more appropriate balance between your role as headteacher and your part-time teaching role within the school. They recognise that this sometimes has an impact on the opportunities that you have to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and to then accurately evaluate where further improvements can be made.

The partnerships that you have built up with other schools, particularly through the Ashbourne Dove Valley Teaching School Alliance, are used well to share good practice and to allow staff to observe and learn from good and outstanding teaching in other schools. You have also worked closely with the local authority and they have provided effective support, for example in improving the teaching of phonics in early reading.

Safeguarding is effective.

You place the safeguarding of pupils at the heart of the work that you and all members of staff do. Training in safeguarding is thorough and regular. When new members of staff are appointed you ensure that, as part of their induction process, they are fully aware of school policies and understand their responsibilities to protect pupils. Recruitment systems are rigorous and ensure that appropriate checks are made before teachers and other staff start work in the school. There is a strong focus on ensuring that pupils are safe in school, with appropriate risk assessments carried out for specific activities. Regular fire evacuation practices are carried out, including a further practice shortly after any new pupil joins the school. This demonstrates the emphasis that is placed on every pupil's safety and well-being. Good systems are in place to ensure that pupils know about the risks that use of the internet could pose. Pupils understand about cyber bullying and feel strongly that bullying does not occur at their school. Attendance is consistently above the national average. This is due to the effective work that you and other staff do to ensure that pupils and parents understand the impact that regular attendance has on learning.

Inspection findings

- The teaching of writing in school has improved since the last inspection. Pupils are provided with a good range of opportunities to write independently and at length, both within their English work and in other subjects, such as geography and history. There is a strong focus from teachers on ensuring that pupils are accurate in their spelling and punctuation. Teachers all follow the school's agreed marking policy and identify spelling mistakes through marking. Pupils are subsequently required to correct errors. Pupils develop a well-formed cursive style of writing as they move through the school and as a result their work is well presented. They use their strong reading skills to good effect in their writing, showing imagination and well-chosen vocabulary. This leads to pupils making good progress in writing.
- Pupils have a very positive attitude towards reading and this is apparent through the expression and enthusiasm that they show when reading aloud. Teachers encourage reading effectively through studies of books that interest pupils and

that are appropriate to their age. For example, during the inspection older pupils were all captivated by the class study of the book 'The White Horse of Zennor.' They discussed what they felt the author was trying to convey through particular words and phrases and were then motivated to write their own pieces of work in a similar style.

- The teaching of early reading has been successfully developed and extended since the last inspection. Nursery and Reception children in the early years class take part in a daily phonics lesson and this approach is maintained for the pupils in the key stage 1 class. Teachers ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of sounds and can then apply them when they encounter unfamiliar words. As a result, pupils make good progress in reading and attain standards above those that are expected for their age.
- Leaders recognised that pupils have not previously all been sufficiently secure in their core mathematical knowledge and this has led to a slight decline in the proportion making expected progress as they move through the school. Leaders developed well thought-out plans to address this, which have led to an increased emphasis on teaching basic mathematical knowledge, such as multiplication and subtraction facts, in greater depth and with more regularity. As a result, pupils' ability to add, subtract, multiply and divide is now far more robust and pupils demonstrate secure age-appropriate knowledge. However, teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities for them to apply their mathematical skills in investigative and problem-solving activities, using reasoning. This limits pupils' abilities to apply mathematical skills in other subject areas, such as science.
- Teachers plan and teach lessons that are well matched to the different abilities within the classes. Success criteria are used effectively in subjects such as mathematics and writing to provide pupils with varying and appropriate levels of challenge. Feedback to pupils through teachers' marking is thorough and well linked to these success criteria. Pupils are given time to reflect on and act upon marking and say that it helps them in their learning.
- While the most able pupils undertake work that is at a higher level of challenge, the expectations from teachers are still not always sufficiently demanding. This means that not all of the most able pupils have recently reached the highest levels of attainment. School leaders are aware of this and they have looked at and brought in approaches used successfully in other schools to ensure that a greater proportion of the most able pupils achieve higher outcomes. It is, however, too early to fully see the impact of these approaches on pupils' attainment and progress.
- The very small number of disadvantaged pupils in school make similar progress and attain similar outcomes to their classmates. Their progress is generally similar to other pupils nationally. The school makes good and effective use of the additional pupil premium funding. It is matched closely to individual needs, including through teaching assistant support and funding to ensure that the pupils have the same opportunities as all others in school.
- The school's Christian values underpin the work of the school and provide the pupils with good opportunities for reflection. Pupils have a deep appreciation of the natural wonder of the world, fostered very effectively through the opportunities to undertake learning outside the classroom. Very good use is

made of the stimulating and striking local area in the Peak District to support learning across the curriculum and to promote healthy lifestyles. Rangers from the Peak District National Park work alongside pupils and this expertise is used effectively to promote a depth of learning. For example, recently all key stage 2 pupils walked to the top of Thorpe Cloud and undertook geological studies as part of their topic work on mountains.

- A biannual visit to London is used to support older pupils' understanding of wider society and to increase their knowledge of the democratic processes in this country through a visit to the Houses of Parliament, where they watch a debate.
- Pupils have good opportunities to contribute their voice to the decisions that the school makes through their involvement in the school council. They make a very positive contribution to the local community. For example, pupils regularly organise and help to run a farmers market at the school. Their development as responsible citizens is supported well by the school. However, teaching in school has not yet ensured that pupils have a secure understanding that respect, tolerance and the right of law are fundamental and central British values.
- Due to the size of the school, a very significant amount of monitoring and evaluation falls on your shoulders as headteacher, alongside your teaching commitment. This has an impact upon your ability to always accurately evaluate the actions that have been taken to improve teaching and learning. Governors are aware of this and have made changes in the staffing structure in school that are intended to address any imbalance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more opportunities are provided for pupils to apply problem-solving and reasoning in mathematics
- expectations from teachers for the most able pupils are sufficiently high
- systems for monitoring the work of the school are refined to allow for more effective evaluation
- teachers ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of fundamental British values and how they demonstrate them through their lives.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your staff. I also met with four governors,

including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the school day. I also considered the 18 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and looked at free-text comments from 12 parents. I visited, together with you, all classes to observe teaching and learning. I met with a group of pupils, including members of the school council, and listened to some pupils read. I also spoke with pupils in lessons and on the playground.

I scrutinised information about children's progress during last academic year. I considered other documentation, including the school's self-evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the school, and checked the school website.