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Mr G Verling
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Verling

Short inspection of Norton-in-Hales CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2017, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and governors know the school exceptionally well. Your school documentation and development plans are highly effective. You have worked well since the last inspection to address areas for improvement and respond to any emerging needs. I was impressed by the extent to which you know your pupils on an individual basis. During our meetings and discussions with pupils, you and your staff were able to pinpoint the needs of every child and outline how you were supporting them to both make progress and feel safe at Norton-in-Hales.

The school has a happy and welcoming culture. The vast majority of parents that I spoke to at the gate, and those that responded to Ofsted's free text service, were positive about school life and highly complimentary of the school's work. Comments from parents included: 'Norton-in-Hales is a wonderful school' and 'The school's ethos and sense of community are exemplary.' The school is proud of its Christian ethos and is at the heart of the community.

During the last inspection, the school was asked to improve teaching and rates of progress in Reception and provide training for teaching assistants. You have restructured learning for the youngest children in school so that there are fewer age

groups in the same class. The restructuring has improved the extent to which staff are able to meet the needs of children. Work in books demonstrates that children are making at least typical progress from their starting points. The early years leader keeps detailed information about every child. You and the early years leader use this information and historical data to devise action plans and short-term schemes of work. While this information is valuable, some of it is quite extensive and not easy to interpret. You have identified this as an area for development and you have planned to work with an adviser to review and streamline assessment practice further. Your work will ensure that any trends in achievement are better understood and quickly acted upon. Teaching assistants have received a range of training and now have their own performance management procedures. I observed teaching assistants offering valuable support to pupils in the classes that we visited during the inspection.

Since the last inspection, you have broadly maintained strong outcomes across the school. However, in 2016, standards in writing at both key stages were below those found nationally. Though the school is a small school and therefore one pupil can have a significant impact on the overall outcomes, you quickly recognised that improvements were needed and devised a comprehensive plan. Firstly, you and governors have restructured classes to offer even greater focus to the teaching of English and mathematics. You have also adopted new approaches to the teaching of handwriting and spelling. Assessment information and the work in pupils' books provide evidence that your actions are resulting in better rates of progress across the school. The improvements and clarity of your response demonstrate the effectiveness of leadership within the school. You recognise that these improvements must now be embedded further and that staff will require more opportunities to share their practice and moderate outcomes in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are appropriate and that record-keeping is of a high quality. You and the school business manager are well organised and maintain clear systems and procedures to ensure that pupils are safe. You keep detailed chronologies outlining the support you offer to families and you are quick to follow up with other agencies if you have any concerns. Staff receive regular training and pupils' safety and well-being is a priority. A link governor, with expertise in safeguarding, supports the school to undertake audits and checks.

Inspection findings

- The school analyses attendance records carefully and keeps a watchful eye on any pupil group, or group of pupils, whose attendance becomes a concern. Overall rates of attendance are above those found nationally.
- Children are making at least typical rates of progress from their different starting points in the early years foundation stage. Staff use their observations of learning to plan activities that meet the needs of children. Children settle quickly to their work in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class. Children are attentive to the

teacher, follow requests quickly and were observed demonstrating key strengths in mathematics. They can, for example, successfully double and halve a range of numbers.

- The teaching of phonics has developed considerably since the last inspection. The school has adopted a more consistent and systematic approach to the teaching of early reading. The progress of pupils is carefully tracked and outcomes in the national Year 1 screening check are improving over time. Pupils' books also demonstrate that they are successfully applying their understanding of phonics in their writing.
- Writing has been a clear priority for the school since experiencing a dip in outcomes in 2016. The school has now adopted a more consistent approach to the assessment of writing and is embedding new approaches to handwriting and spelling. Pupils are also taught in smaller groups for writing in the mornings. The school is split into four classes so that staff can offer a greater level of support and respond to the needs of pupils. The school's strategies are proving to be successful. Outcomes in pupils' writing books align to teachers' judgements. The assessments of standards in writing are accurate and rates of progress have increased across the school. Above all, you and your teachers know the individual needs of every child exceptionally well. You use this knowledge to target support and move pupils' learning on.
- Additional support for disadvantaged pupils is carefully planned by leaders. Governors review the impact of this support in their meetings. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 in 2016 were lower than those of other pupils nationally. However, this relates to the specific size and context of the cohort and is not replicated across the school. The work of the school is ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make rates of progress that are similar to their peers.
- Although leaders and governors do monitor and evaluate the impact of pupil premium expenditure, at the time of the inspection this information was not available in a published strategy or on the school's website.
- Governors demonstrate an exceptional knowledge of the school. They are proud of their work and offer an appropriate level of support and challenge to leaders. They are able to articulate the school's overall effectiveness well and have been instrumental in devising development plans and responding to any identified weaknesses.
- The local authority has supported the school to develop its processes for self-evaluation. The support has been effective and has helped the school to accurately identify the impact of its work and devise appropriate development plans.
- The majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey say that they are proud to work at the school. Staff that I spoke to during the inspection, report that they are supported in their roles and are provided with training to improve their practice.

- Pupils that I spoke to report that they feel safe at school. Pupils are keen to share their learning and I observed many of them approaching you to share work that they were proud of. The behaviour of pupils was exceptional throughout the inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment procedures in the early years are refined so that any trends in achievement are acted upon quickly
- outcomes in writing improve further by providing ongoing opportunities for staff to share good practice and moderate the assessments that they make of pupils' work
- the school fully adheres to the Department for Education's guidance on what schools must publish online.

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 Shropshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the school's self-evaluation and development plans. The following lines of enquiry were agreed: the extent to which leaders have created a culture of safeguarding and how pupils are supported to regularly attend school; rates of progress for children in the early years and how ready they are to transfer to Year 1; the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics; how leaders have responded to the dip in writing and how effectively assessment information is being used to improve outcomes; and how well additional funding is used to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

I reviewed the school's single central record with you and your business manager. I conducted lesson observations in every class and reviewed pupils' progress in a range of books. These activities were undertaken jointly with you.

I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I had a discussion with the school's adviser via the telephone.

I spoke to pupils throughout the day and met with parents at the school gate. I heard two Year 2 pupils reading. I reviewed the 22 parental responses to Ofsted's free text service and 22 responses on Parent View. I took account of the 19 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 12 responses from staff to the staff questionnaire.

I scrutinised the following documents: the self-evaluation plan, school development plan, child protection files, personnel files, governing body minutes, attendance data, risk assessments, assessment information, induction procedures, performance management information and local authority reviews.