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Abigail Clay
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Dear Mrs Clay

Short inspection of Topcliffe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment in 2015, you have provided determined and insightful leadership that has brought about significant improvements to teaching and learning. Working alongside a highly skilled and talented governing body, you have assembled a new team of effective and enthusiastic teachers who push each other on to make further improvements, ably supported by a skilled team of teaching assistants. You have identified the school's strengths and current priorities for improvement accurately. These are clearly outlined in the school's detailed self-evaluation and development plan. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, ensuring that changes in staffing and leadership have not detracted from pupils' learning and wider educational experiences.

You, your staff and governors have significantly raised expectations of pupils and the standards they can reach, which helps all pupils to achieve the very best outcomes. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve. This is a result of sharing good practice with local schools, and of teachers working closely together to implement new initiatives and approaches successfully. You have also ensured that the school's recently created tracking system for pupils' progress has evolved through thoughtful developments tailored to the needs of the school, with further refinements still being made.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of your inclusive and harmonious school, aptly summed up by the school's motto of 'growing, believing, achieving together'. Pupils are proud to attend, with rates of attendance being above average. They develop good citizenship skills through the curriculum, and have opportunities to take responsibilities in class and in school. Pupils feel safe, grow in confidence, respect and listen to each other, and develop excellent attitudes to learning. The school is a well-ordered, tidy and inspiring learning space with a range of interesting and thought-provoking displays in classrooms and shared areas.

The school has successfully tackled the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Achievement in English and mathematics has improved, especially in English, because of an improvement in the quality of teaching. Pupils also now have a broader cultural awareness, and a deeper understanding of other faiths. Pupils' achievement in mathematics, although still good, lags behind achievement in reading and writing. You have introduced a wide range of new initiatives to tackle this disparity, including timetable changes, planning tools, practical equipment, specialist training for staff and after-school clubs, but there has been insufficient time for the impact of these actions to be seen.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have taken on the role of designated safeguarding lead yourself and have carried it out effectively, working closely with the designated governor for safeguarding. The designated governor for safeguarding has led a detailed and incisive audit of safeguarding procedures that has ensured that all policies, records and procedures are of high quality and up to date. Records of incidents of concern are meticulous and the school takes seriously any allegations of bullying. The very few incidents that have occurred are recorded carefully and the pupils involved are monitored. All staff are trained appropriately and the safeguarding policy is available for all adults. The policy gives clear guidance on the actions adults should take if they have any concerns. E-safety is a priority and pupils are very well informed as to how to be safe online. Pupils are exceptionally well informed of the different types of bullying they may encounter, and how to deal with it.

All staff state that children are safe in school, and the vast majority of parents are positive about behaviour management and pupils' safety. The culture of keeping pupils safe in Topcliffe is deeply rooted and includes pupils' emotional well-being as well as their physical safety, with a newly appointed emotional literacy support assistant recently deployed. Pupils say that they feel safe and are educated well on how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations.

Inspection findings

- You and your teachers and teaching assistants have worked hard and successfully to improve the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics. Work in pupils' books is of a good standard, very well presented and handwriting is mostly neat and legible. Pupils are proud and pleased to be awarded their 'pen licence' when their handwriting reaches a high standard. Most

pupils have many examples of extended pieces of writing, with pupils accessing a wide range of genres. Pupils know how well they have done in each piece of work and understand their next steps to improve as a result of clear and helpful comments from the teacher. Time is taken to allow pupils to read comments and complete additional challenges to move their learning forward.

- The quality of pupils' reading is high. Pupils read fluently and with expression, using their phonic knowledge to read new words. 'Home school link' books show that most read regularly at home, usually with a parent, and report a love of reading.
- Pupils are attentive in lessons, driven to succeed and have largely excellent attitudes to learning. 'Learning walls' allow pupils opportunities to be active in their learning, share their ideas and thoughts with their peers and the teacher. Activities seen in classrooms were imaginative and allowed pupils to participate actively. Occasionally, consistently high challenge and stretch for most-able pupils were not seen in mathematics, and are not clearly evident in pupils' books.
- The quality of the provision in early years remains a strength of the school. Most children enter Reception with skills and abilities that would be expected for their age. Children all make consistently good progress across the setting. Children are settled, happy and cooperate very well with each other in teacher-led and child-initiated activities. Excellent use is made of the outdoor and indoor environment to promote children's curiosity and investigation. Learning journals illustrate children's progress in learning well, and are supplemented by carefully chosen photographs.
- There are many opportunities taken for children to write across the early years setting, many children choosing to do this during child-initiated sessions. Some children are already reading fluently by sight, but can use their phonic knowledge to build and blend unknown words. Opportunities for children to access number activities in independent play and investigation are less evident than for reading and writing. Adult-led sessions are well structured and fun. Relationships are strong and underpin children's desire to have a go and work with confidence.
- The school has put into place many strategies to accelerate pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics. Internal tracking data suggests that this is beginning to have an impact, although standards reached still lag behind reading and writing. Booster clubs, changes to planning and assessment, shared moderation, sharing of good practice with other schools in the North Star Teaching Alliance, specialist support and curriculum changes are still in their infancy in terms of impact due to their recent introduction. Work in books is plentiful, neatly presented and with an increasing range of reasoning and problem-solving activities. Currently, new tracking systems do not clearly track pupils' progress in detail, and require further refinement. There is less evidence of consistently high challenge and stretch in mathematics, especially for the most able pupils.
- The leadership and management of the school are strong, and there is a tangible drive to improve from all leaders including governors. Governors are highly skilled in their roles, know the school inside out, and know the journey it has taken to reach this point. They are very well informed, take nothing at face value, question and challenge very effectively, and are fully engaged in putting into

place key actions to move the school forward even more rapidly. Governors share the headteacher's ambition to become an outstanding school in every respect for the benefit of the pupils. Governors have reset their expectations for pupils' progress and attainment, acknowledging that they were not high enough previously. The capacity for the school to improve further is very strong.

- The school has worked hard to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of other worldwide faiths, and an enhanced awareness of people of other cultures. Displays around school, an overview of the curriculum and work in pupils' books show that pupils have access to a rich and broad curriculum, including learning about other faiths and other cultures. There are trips to other places of worship such as a local mosque, and pupils enjoy a range of visitors to school. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 each have a French pen pal, while pupils in Years 1 and 2 have links to a school in Kenya. Work has been undertaken on Fair Trade, and pupils have taken part in a diversity collective worship session and workshops. British values are embedded across the curriculum. There are democratic school council elections and pupils explore democracy as part of history topics such as when studying the Greeks. There was a live European Union referendum debate and pupils raise money for good causes around the world in various charity days. Pupils enjoy music, weekly art sessions, physical education and science.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress that pupils make in mathematics continues to accelerate so that the standards reached match those in reading and writing by:
 - checking that teachers' expectations of pupils remain consistently high, and that work set in mathematics challenges and stretches pupils' thinking and understanding, especially for the most able pupils
 - further refining the systems for tracking pupils' progress in mathematics
 - ensuring that younger pupils always have practical opportunities to explore number in independent and child-initiated activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection the following areas were focused on:

- Is safeguarding effective?
- Has the quality of teaching improved in English and mathematics?
- Is the early years provision still a strength?
- Is mathematics becoming a weakness?
- Are leadership and management still strong given recent changes in personnel?
- Has the school tackled the issue of a narrow cultural and multi-faith awareness?

During the inspection I met with you and your teaching team. You and I observed teaching and learning in every classroom in English and mathematics lessons. I also met with members of your governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school both in lessons and in more formal meetings. I also listened to pupils of different abilities from each year group read. I considered the views of parents as gathered from your own surveys and from Parent View. The views of staff were gathered from surveys and from discussions. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised while in lessons and from a sample selected. A range of documents were scrutinised, including those relating to safeguarding, governors' meetings, external evaluations of the school, performance management, the school's development plan and self-evaluation, the curriculum and pupils' achievement.