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Mr Stephen Dunn
Hathern Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Dunn

Short inspection of Hathern Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has improved since the previous inspection. Under your clear leadership, the school provides an environment in which pupils enjoy their learning. They are known and valued as individuals and relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. This positive and celebratory ethos permeates all of the school's work. Leaders at all levels, including governors, are committed to improving the school further and are ambitious for its future.

Improving the quality of pupils' writing has been a priority for the school. Leaders have identified that pupils' writing, and especially that of the boys, is not as good as their reading or mathematics. Progress is being made in this area across the school and standards are rising. Teachers look for interesting and motivating ways to engage pupils' enthusiasm. Where this is most effective, pupils speak excitedly about what they are doing and produce high-quality work. For example, during the inspection, pupils in upper key stage 2 were writing their own horror or thriller stories. The classroom was lit by small electric candles and the teacher created a 'spooky' atmosphere very effectively. The work produced by many pupils was of an exceptionally high standard. Afterwards, pupils spoke of how much they enjoyed the lesson and wanted to carry on writing.

There is a similar picture in the Reception class, where pupils are making very quick progress. A significant proportion of pupils joined the school in September 2016 with low levels of skills in writing. These pupils have swiftly moved from very basic mark-making to now being able to form letters accurately, with some writing simple words correctly. This is the result of the focused teaching of writing skills, which pupils are very much enjoying. Similarly positive progress is being seen in other year groups.

There have been a number of staff changes in recent months, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher. New teachers have settled quickly and are already making a positive impact on the quality of learning. Significant building work, inside and outside the school, has not impeded the pace of improvement. Pupils and staff are enjoying the new classrooms and space that the building work has produced.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and where support is needed. This is because time is invested in a scheduled programme of monitoring events that provide leaders with the information they need. As a result, the progress that pupils are making in reading, writing and mathematics is very clearly understood. Leaders are less clear about the quality of learning in other subjects, including science, geography and history, because much less is done to evaluate the impact of teaching.

Parents are very positive about the school. Over one third of parents responded to the online questionnaire issued during the inspection. All those who responded stated that they would recommend the school to other parents. On every question, parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and its leaders.

Governors provide a good level of support and challenge for school leaders. They are regular visitors to the school and are very familiar with its workings. Governors hold school leaders to account effectively and have high aspirations for the school's future.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding systems and procedures comply with statutory requirements. Pre-employment checks on staff are undertaken effectively and with great attention to detail. Other adults, including governors, volunteers and supply staff, are also checked carefully. There is a clear audit trail that ensures that the single central register (where information is stored) is monitored by senior leaders and governors on a regular basis.

Staff and leaders regard safeguarding as a priority. They know pupils well as individuals and provide a safe and welcoming environment. Statutory training for safeguarding, child protection and first aid is up to date. There are clear and comprehensive records which include dates and renewal points. Systems to reduce risk are secure. For example, access to the pond within the 'forest school' area is protected by two locked gates and a metre-high fence.

Inspection findings

- Pupils are currently making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, pupils in Year 6 left the school with standards in reading and mathematics that were in line with the national averages. The standard of writing was below the national level. Outcomes for pupils in Year 2 were broadly in line with the national picture in reading, writing and mathematics, but the proportions of pupils working at above the expected level were well below the national average. The work in pupils' books for this cohort of pupils, now in Year 3, supports the school's assessment data, which indicates that they are now making good progress.
- Boys are making less progress in writing than girls. In some year groups, the attainment gap between boys and girls in this subject is narrowing but in others it remains. In some classes, there is a link between the quality of writing and the quality of presentation. It is too easy to predict the gender of the pupil by simply looking at the quality of handwriting and presentation in these classes, where expectations of boys are too low, and their work reflects this. In other classes, boys and girls present their work with equal levels of pride and care.
- Leaders make good use of assessment data to track the progress of individual pupils and groups. This information is well used to set targets and to hold teachers to account for the impact of their work on learning. Leaders' regular checks on the quality of teaching include lesson observations, work scrutiny, learning walks and pupils' progress meetings. Additionally, leaders frequently visit lessons on a less formal basis in order to understand what teaching is typically like.
- The monitoring of subjects other than English and mathematics is an area in need of further improvement. At present, leaders check that the full range of subjects in the national curriculum are taught, but do not do enough to evaluate the quality of learning in these subjects. It is clear, for example, from pupils' work that too much of the work that pupils do in science is about the processes involved in an experiment, and too little emphasis is placed on what pupils have learned.
- Pupils' books provide clear evidence of work that is both challenging and exciting. Teachers are working hard to plan lessons that are engaging and motivating, and pupils enjoy coming to school and going to lessons. Attendance levels continue to be well above the national average.
- Pupils say that they are challenged and enjoy it when things are hard. Typically, pupils say that they especially enjoy solving difficult problems in mathematics.
- There are a small number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium. Almost all are on track to achieve age-related expectations, or are making the expected progress from low starting points. This group of pupils is tracked carefully. The support and interventions that are provided closely match their needs.
- Pupils behave very well in and around the school. They say that they feel safe and are confident that staff will help them if required.
- Pupils are very positive about the range of experiences that are available to

them, and struggle to identify where their school could do better. They are very proud of their school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of boys' writing are consistently high across the school
- leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the full range of subjects in the national curriculum more rigorously.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection focused on five main lines of enquiry. These were shared with you and determined much of the inspection work. The lines of enquiry were concerned with: the quality of writing; outcomes for disadvantaged pupils; challenge for most-able pupils; outcomes for boys in Year 3 and the quality of teaching of the full range of subjects in the national curriculum.

I made at least one visit to all classrooms where I observed teaching, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils. You accompanied me on almost all of these visits. I observed lunchtime and playtime and spoke with pupils about their experiences at the school. I met with you and two senior leaders to discuss the school's performance and evaluate the quality of leadership. In addition, I met and had a discussion with five governors. I evaluated school documentation, including its self-evaluation and development plans. I scrutinised systems and documentation associated with safeguarding. I also walked around the perimeter of the school grounds to ensure that the access to areas such as the pond was secure.