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Mrs Kirsti Nelson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nelson

Short inspection of Staplegrove Church School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully steered the school through the process of becoming an academy in April 2014. You have used this as an opportunity to improve the school while maintaining its caring and inclusive character.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. You have ensured that teaching has improved through high-quality training opportunities from a wide range of sources. Pupils' mathematical skills are better developed, particularly in key stage 2. Pupils are able to solve problems and explain their reasoning eloquently. Consequently, pupils make consistently good progress in mathematics. Teachers use accurate assessment information to plan learning for pupils which closely matches their needs, and so pupils are challenged and motivated to do their best.

One of the hallmarks of your school is the high morale of the staff. Your skill in encouraging their professional development has made this happen. You have brought out the best in staff at all levels and many now offer training to other schools as a result.

In September 2014, in addition to your current role, you became the headteacher of a smaller local school, Norton Fitzwarren Church School, in a collaborative arrangement.

The Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust has provided good-quality challenge and support for the school. As a result of the trust's oversight, governors have been empowered. They have sharpened their skills and made their strategic planning more incisive. Governors are very committed to the school and are passionate about the Christian values that underpin it. They check that the changes you put in place prove to be effective, and they are not afraid to challenge you in any instances where pupils' progress is not accelerating sufficiently. Consequently, through the major changes of governance in recent years, the school has continued to provide a good quality of education for local families.

Parents are positive about the school. The overwhelming majority would recommend this school to others. One parent's comment is typical of many, 'I cannot praise the school staff enough. I believe they get the balance of focusing on learning needs and nurturing young people just right.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and the other designated safeguarding leaders have ensured that training for staff and governors is suitable and timely. Staff are given frequent safeguarding updates through the year. They are left in no doubt that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Your staff are aware of the possible signs of harm and remain vigilant. They record all concerns they have about pupils and refer them to you through a well-managed process.

The pupils I spoke to during my visit said they feel safe and well cared for at school. They told me that there is very little bullying in the school but that on the few occasions when it does happen staff deal with it well. Parents agree: a very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, believe that bullying is rare.

Inspection findings

- You have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your school because your work to monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress is well established. As a consequence, your development plans are well focused. You and your senior leaders have established a culture where teachers expect good progress from all pupils. Your ambition is to raise pupils' aspirations across the school still further so that more pupils achieve at the very highest level at the end of each key stage.

- One of the key lines of enquiry which I followed on this inspection centred on the progress of pupils, particularly girls, in key stage 1. Pupils in key stage 1 achieve well in phonics. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard at the end of Year 1 is consistently above the national average and has been rising year on year for three years. Teachers and teaching assistants are adept at developing pupils' decoding and blending skills, and consequently pupils have a good understanding on which to base their reading in Year 2 and beyond.
- In 2016, all pupils attained the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 1. However, the proportion of girls who went on to achieve at a greater depth in reading was below average. Leaders have introduced initiatives to raise the profile of reading and increase the proportion of pupils who attain greater depth. For example, you have invested in a new reading scheme and introduced the 'author of the term' initiative for each year group. You have begun effective work with parents and several now come into school regularly to listen to pupils read. Pupils are responding well to these changes. Many pupils I spoke to, particularly girls, talked animatedly about their favourite authors and could describe different genres confidently.
- Mathematics in key stage 2 was another of my key lines of enquiry. Pupils make good progress in mathematics in key stage 2 as a result of teaching which is consistently effective. In 2016, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in Year 6 in mathematics was above the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining a higher standard was in line with the national average. Senior leaders have given teachers clear direction and suitable training to ensure that their mathematical subject knowledge is strong. For example, leaders have recently updated the policy for calculation across the school and monitor its application effectively. Consequently, pupils experience a consistent approach which helps them learn. Teachers encourage pupils to consider different ways of tackling mathematical problems and, as a result, pupils are confident of success when they approach new or unfamiliar questions. Pupils' work shows that more are now on track to reach the higher standard at the end of this year.
- A third key line of enquiry concerned the teaching of writing in key stage 2. You have identified writing at greater depth in key stage 2 as a priority for improvement. Pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2 was in line with the national average in 2016 but you are ambitious for more pupils to go beyond this. You and your senior leaders are passionate about the use of pupils' talk as a means of developing their writing skills. Senior leaders have made sure that teachers receive high-quality training in this area and, as a result, teachers are confident and skilled in developing pupils' writing. You make sure that educational visits and other cultural events are used well to help pupils develop their vocabulary and ability to write about their experiences. For example, pupils who spoke to me said that they really enjoyed the recent theatre visit to see 'Around the World in Eighty Days'. The school's assessment information shows that, compared with last year, a higher proportion of pupils currently in Year 6 are attaining greater depth in writing.

- Pupils are polite and well mannered both in lessons and around the school at playtime and lunchtime. They respect each other and their teachers and this contributes to the progress pupils make. Teachers celebrate pupils' achievements frequently – for example, through assemblies, displays and pupils being chosen as 'Staplegrave Stars' in the newsletter. Pupils respond well to this recognition and to the positive environment that this school provides.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the work with parents to support pupils' reading, which has started successfully, is extended further
- pupils are given more opportunities to write extended pieces of work using different writing techniques at an earlier stage.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, a representative of the multi academy trust, your literacy and numeracy coordinators, and your foundation stage leader. I spoke with several pupils informally at break and lunchtime, and held a meeting with pupils from the school council. I scrutinised a variety of documents including minutes of governing body meetings, the school's assessment information, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. I undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils during lessons.