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Mrs Nancy Lees
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Dear Mrs Lees

Short inspection of Castleton CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further development and are taking effective action to bring about continued school improvement.

Castleton CofE Primary School is considerably smaller than the average-sized primary school and the way you have built success into this situation is a strength of the school. Staff know all pupils well as individuals and are able to ensure that each pupil's needs are met. There is a strong sense of community within the school. Pupils describe themselves as 'one big family' and parents appreciate the close relationships they have with the school. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. You have created a culture of collaboration and care where all pupils and staff feel valued.

A Christian ethos permeates the school, contributing to the caring values shared by pupils. For example, they elected to write their own school prayer of celebration, set to the tune of a well-known pop song. During the inspection, all pupils sang this with relish before they ate their lunch. Pupils are also taught about other faiths and religions, and show understanding and acceptance of these. They understand and appreciate diversity. Pupils are kind and caring.

Governors are committed and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They understand where further improvement is needed and share leaders' ambition for pupils' success. Governors are knowledgeable and have the skills needed to hold leaders to account, challenging and offering support as appropriate.

Since the last inspection you have developed a new approach to assessment and feedback. Pupils and staff understand the colour coded system and pupils' books show that this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Not all pupils respond effectively, however, which means that they do not all benefit as much as they might. For example, some pupils do not use their targets when they plan their writing. You are aware of this and are exploring different means of supporting pupils to do this more consistently.

A previously identified area for development was pupils' handwriting. You have ensured that pupils have regular opportunities to develop their handwriting skills. Teachers have high expectations of presentation and pupils are keen to meet these. Pupils' books show clear progress in the quality of pupils' handwriting in their time at the school. Younger children are encouraged to develop their letter formation as part of their phonics learning.

The last inspection identified the need to use pupils' enthusiasm to think for themselves about their learning. You have ensured that there are opportunities for various independent and group activities. Pupils are able to concentrate for sustained periods and work well in pairs and small groups, maintaining focus on their work. Pupils are highly independent and self-reflective learners.

You have identified the need to revise your approach to teaching writing. Following collaboration with other local schools, you have introduced a new strategy which pupils have helped to name 'Ready, Steady, Write.' This strategy supports pupils to write independently, under timed conditions, and encourages them to consider pre-determined success criteria. They review their own work and then receive feedback from their teacher. As this is a relatively new approach, it is too early to evaluate whether pupils are making faster progress in writing. Pupils say that they find this approach useful, however, and the quality of work in their books is improving. Accelerating pupils' progress and raising their achievement in writing remain priorities.

You have rightly identified the achievement of the most able pupils as a further priority. Since the last inspection, a smaller proportion of pupils than the national average have reached the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You have clear plans in place to support this group of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. You collaborate with other schools to ensure that there is always a designated person to contact in case of concerns raised when you are not in school.

Staff and governors are appropriately trained and understand their responsibility in ensuring pupils' safety. Processes for making referrals are straightforward and understood by all. Records are clear and detailed.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. They are fully aware of potential dangers; for example those posed by the internet. Pupils understand the difference between bullying and teasing. They say that bullying is rare but are confident that it would be dealt with quickly and effectively, should it occur. They say that they feel safe in school and appreciate the rules that are in place to safeguard them.

Inspection findings

- You have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further development. You have evaluated pupils' attainment and progress, and have used this information to produce clear plans to ensure further improvement. For example, you have written a clear action plan that tackles weaknesses in the teaching of writing.
- You have ensured that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are accurate, for example by working with staff from local schools to agree standards and moderate teachers' assessments. This has enabled teachers to identify accurately the aspects of pupils' work that require additional support.
- The quality of teaching is good and it is particularly strong in key stage 2. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' abilities and use this knowledge to plan activities which both support and challenge pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress in a range of subjects.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Pupils behave well in lessons because teachers plan interesting activities that engage and motivate them. Pupils are keen to do well.
- You have ensured that teachers are kept up to date with educational developments. Staff regularly meet with staff from other local schools to share good practice and to develop materials to support pupils' learning. For example, a teacher has recently worked with a neighbouring school to develop a strategy to support pupils' understanding of the mastery curriculum in mathematics in key stage 2.
- Ensuring that the most able pupils achieve the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics remains a priority. You are aware that a smaller proportion of pupils than nationally reach the higher standard in these subjects. You have begun to tackle this, for example through the new approaches to writing and the mathematics curriculum. You have also purchased a series of fiction texts that challenge the most able pupils. You insist that pupils read texts that match their abilities so that they develop a more extensive vocabulary.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is above the national average. Pupils and parents recognise the importance of attending regularly.

- You have ensured that pupils experience a variety of opportunities beyond the context of this very small primary school.
- Pupils attend a number of events at other schools that help to develop their social skills and confidence. For example, they interact with pupils from local schools at sports and charity events. You ensure that pupils are well prepared to make the transition to secondary school. Pupils in Year 6 attend a series of transition events at the nearby secondary school and staff liaise thoroughly to ensure that pupils' needs are met.
- You have made effective use of the physical education (PE) and primary sport funding. Pupils were keen to share their experiences of a range of sporting activities, for example badminton and archery. Pupils appreciate and enjoy these experiences.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently use the strategies already in place to support the most able pupils of all ages so that they reach the higher standards of which they are capable
- teachers support pupils in planning their writing to include the targets set for them in feedback on how to improve their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with the headteacher, a class teacher and the chair of the governing body. I also spoke, by telephone, to a representative of the local authority. I met with a group of pupils formally and also spoke with most pupils informally during their lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I visited both classes with you and observed pupils' learning. I looked at pupils' work both in lessons and in a sample of their books. I considered the eight free text responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View. I scrutinised a range of documents, including records relating to safeguarding and behaviour, school policies and monitoring records. I also looked at the information published on the school's website.