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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Carolyn Tommey
Executive headteacher
Norton St Philip Church of England First School
Church Street
Norton St Philip
Bath
Somerset
BA2 7LU

Dear Mrs Tommey

Short inspection of Norton St Philip Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The school federated with Rode Methodist VC First School in April 2016. A new governing body was established for the federation and the leadership secured with your appointment as the executive headteacher of the two schools. Most of the staff were not present at the time of the previous Ofsted inspection. Nevertheless, despite these significant changes, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as executive headteacher of Norton St Philip Church of England First School you have wasted no time to establish a strong culture of learning. You, your staff and governors are aware of the areas for improvement such as the focus to further raise pupils' achievement to enable them to achieve greater depth in their learning.

Your strong leadership has galvanised the staff. There is a shared passion and determination to drive forward improvements in the quality of teaching and to raise achievement for all pupils. You create opportunities for staff to share their knowledge and expertise and moderate pupils' work both within the school and with other local schools. The previous inspection highlighted the need to improve systems for recording and analysing pupils' achievement and use this information more consistently to plan activities that challenge and extend pupils. This you have successfully achieved. Teachers understand and can successfully apply the school's assessment system to ensure that pupils' progress is carefully tracked and their

needs more precisely met. Consequently, pupils are supported effectively in their learning.

As a result of good teaching, most pupils, irrespective of ability or background, make good progress as they move through the school. Teachers know their pupils extremely well and use this knowledge, combined with their strong subject knowledge, to plan interesting and stimulating work that motivates and enthuses pupils. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They enjoy their work, are curious to find out more and have a desire to improve.

You and your staff have created a warm and welcoming school where pupils enjoy their school experience. A typical comment from pupils was that 'teachers are kind and help us to get better with our work'. Parents are also highly supportive of the school's work. They are particularly pleased with the hard work and dedication of you, your staff and governors to ensure that the federation has not had a negative impact on the quality of care or education their children receive. In the Parent View survey, all parents who responded would recommend the school. Indeed, parents are very complimentary about the school and your leadership. Typical comments were: 'a brilliant job the school is doing' and 'a fantastic, all round school, my child can't wait to get there each morning to learn new things'. Parents also welcome your visible presence and approachability. They are confident that you listen carefully to them when they have any concerns or worries and act quickly to tackle issues raised, to ensure their children enjoy school and make good progress.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included how the school ensures that pupils are safe, the effectiveness of phonics teaching and the impact this has to improve pupils' skills in reading and writing, how leaders ensure the most able pupils make the best possible progress and the effectiveness of governors in holding leaders to account for the quality of education that the school provides. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding of pupils is integral to the work of the school. There is a shared commitment by staff to protect pupils from all possible risks. The school's policies and procedures fully reflect the latest statutory guidelines and follow the most recent national guidance, to which staff resolutely adhere. High-quality training in all aspects of safeguarding provides staff with the knowledge and skills to quickly spot concerns and take action rapidly and with confidence.

You and your governors are fully aware of the utmost importance of recruiting safely. All staff are carefully checked prior to starting employment to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Risk assessments are in place and are monitored closely to ensure they remain fit for purpose. For example, regular checks are carried out to ensure that pupils who travel daily by minibus are kept safe.

Parents are confident that the school takes all the necessary precautions to keep their children safe. They particularly welcome the guidance the school provides on pupils' personal safety. Consequently, pupils are aware of the potential risks when using electronic equipment, for example passing on personal information when using the internet.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- You have made significant changes to the teaching of phonics. There is a consistent approach by teachers to ensure pupils gain the required skills to become confident in their knowledge and understanding of phonics. Teachers have a detailed understanding of what each pupil can and cannot do. Therefore, the activities that teachers plan precisely meet the needs of each pupil. For example, the youngest pupils were engrossed in a detective game where they had to identify different types of words in a text. Using a magnifying glass, they worked with great enthusiasm and diligence to successfully complete the challenge.
- Your careful tracking quickly identifies where pupils are not making enough progress. You act rapidly and put in place additional support in order for them to catch up. Consequently, pupils are making strong progress and are successfully able to apply their knowledge of phonics in their reading and writing.
- Pupils have a love of reading. They use their knowledge of phonics effectively to read with confidence and enjoyment. Pupils I heard read during the inspection were able to do so with fluency, accuracy and a good understanding of the text. The youngest pupils could describe the types of books they enjoy reading, such as adventure stories. They also thoroughly enjoy listening to stories both at school and home. As a result, pupils are typically making good progress with their reading.
- Pupils are provided with a wide range of writing activities. Teachers carefully plan topics on the pupils' interests. Consequently, pupils from a very early age develop a love of learning and are highly motivated to do their very best. For example, pupils are currently engrossed in the topic 'up, up and away'. The recent, school planned, arrival of a hot air balloon at a nearby site ignited pupils' enthusiasm and sparked many investigative questions. This passion was replicated in the pupils' high-quality writing of the experience with well-constructed sentences and exciting vocabulary choices to bring their writing alive. However, you are aware that the presentation of pupils' work is not good enough. You are currently working to ensure that there is a consistent approach to handwriting and presentation across the federation to ensure this is quickly rectified.
- Pupils are being provided with the opportunity to write at length and for different purposes and audiences. Pupils' writing is celebrated in learning displays around the school. Writing viewed in pupils' English work is typically of a high standard and clearly shows pupils are making strong progress. This, however, is not

consistently evident in pupils' writing across other subjects. Pupils do not demonstrate the same high expectations of themselves as writers across a wider range of subjects.

- The most able pupils are making strong progress and achieve greater depth in their reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers plan activities which challenge pupils and make them think deeply about their learning. For example, the most able Year 4 pupils are currently preparing for a 'rocket event' in their science work. Following their participation they will write and present an article for the local parish magazine demonstrating their strong writing skills for a published document. However, you are far from complacent and know that by continuing to focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils, including the most able, could make even stronger progress.
- Governors have an accurate and detailed view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide the necessary challenge and support to ensure that you and your staff remain focused on the key issues. Governors' challenge is informed by teachers' performance information, pupil progress information and the findings of external advisers. As a result, they know the right questions to ask and can appraise the answers to good effect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- focus is maintained on further improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to enable pupils to make the best possible progress
- the quality of pupils' writing is consistent across a wider range of subjects
- the presentation of pupils' work is quickly improved.

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

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and together we talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. We carried out a 'learning walk' through classes at Norton St Philip First School and Rode Methodist VC First School. I also held discussions with members of the governing body,

including the chair of the governing body, and held a telephone conversation with an officer from the local authority. I talked to pupils and heard them read. I took into consideration the responses of 15 questionnaires completed by staff.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school development plan and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. I also checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and attendance information.

I spoke to parents at the start and end of the day. I also took into account the 16 responses to the online survey 'Parent View' and considered 16 additional comments received via text message from parents.