

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



29 March 2017

Mrs Sheriden Edwards
Executive Headteacher
The Harlaxton Church of England Primary School
Swinehill
Harlaxton
Grantham
Lincolnshire
NG32 1HT

Dear Mrs Edwards

Short inspection of The Harlaxton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As executive headteacher, you divide your time between the two schools in the federation. Although the school has experienced some significant changes in staffing, you have ensured that staff have maintained an unswerving commitment to meeting pupils' needs.

Harlaxton is a caring school. Leaders and staff work hard to live up to the school's motto of, 'Eager to learn, caring for others, proud to shine.' The majority of parents who completed the online survey, Parent View, were positive about the support provided for pupils from school staff. One parent said: 'I'm extremely pleased that I chose this school for my child.' The school places high value on positive relationships between staff and pupils and, as a result, pupils show high levels of engagement in their learning. The pupils I spoke with feel valued, happy and safe.

You ensure that the school works closely with other schools in the locality, as well as with your partner school in the federation. Leaders and governors have established strong links with several schools, to share good practice and to develop staff and governor expertise.

Leaders and governors have effectively tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous report. Pupils' independence has been developed by the introduction of a new curriculum which encourages problem-solving skills. Most-able pupils are

generally achieving the standards of which they are capable and leaders are focusing on improving teaching and learning where it can be better. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development by the end of their first year of school was well above the national figure in 2016, as was the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics in Year 1.

However, you and the school's governors are not complacent and constantly look for ways to improve pupils' learning. For example, you have correctly identified that some groups of pupils in the school make slower progress than their peers by the end of key stage 1. You also acknowledged that the progress and attainment of some middle-ability pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils in 2016, was not as strong as it was for other groups of pupils, particularly in reading and mathematics.

School leaders' plans for improvement include these areas and, in addition, set out a comprehensive training programme for teaching assistants to help the school to optimise pupils' progress. Staff are also already tackling necessary improvements in how the science curriculum is taught, in order that pupils can achieve the highest possible standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and senior leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a clear culture in the school of safeguarding being everyone's responsibility. Systems are effective for safeguarding pupils' welfare, including any pupils with persistent absence. Record-keeping is detailed and demonstrates that you and your staff report, record and follow up concerns promptly. There are rigorous, well-documented checks carried out on all staff and volunteers within the school.

Pupils told me that they feel safe and are very well cared for by staff. Pupils showed a clear understanding of how to protect themselves from bullying, including online, and spoke of how they had enjoyed presentations from the local police and the NSPCC.

Governors monitor safeguarding systems to check that they are fit for purpose, and receive regular training to ensure that they are proficient at dealing with child protection issues. The school site is secure and maintained to a high standard, so that pupils and staff are safe.

Inspection findings

- You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous report. There has been a school focus on improving outcomes for the most able pupils and, as a result, more pupils are attaining the higher expectations since the last inspection. Training for teaching assistants and a fresh approach to how the curriculum is taught, with more opportunities for problem solving, has helped to develop pupils' independence. One pupil told me that if he was unsure about what to do in his work, he would try again and ask a friend, before approaching a member of staff. However, training for teaching assistants

still needs to equip staff with the necessary skills to move pupils on in their learning. We both saw occasions during our classroom visits where pupils lost focus because questioning from teaching assistants was not effective enough.

- Working closely with leaders and governors, you have rightly focused on improving outcomes for some groups of pupils as they move through key stage 1. In 2016, attainment in reading particularly, but also in mathematics and writing, was below the national figure for some pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, and below where those pupils could have achieved. The school has acted quickly by introducing a new system for tracking pupils' progress. This system has provided staff with more rigorous information and has led to more timely interventions where pupils are at risk of falling behind. Information provided by you shows that pupils are performing well so far this year.
- Leaders and governors have a clear idea about what is working well in the school. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development in the early years and the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved significantly over the last three years. However, you, and the school's leaders and governors, agreed with me that not enough middle-ability pupils, including disadvantaged middle-ability pupils, made sufficient progress in reading and mathematics in 2016, compared to other groups of pupils in the school. The school's new tracking system is identifying pupils falling behind far sooner than in previous years and, as a result, you were able to show me information which demonstrated that middle-ability pupils across the school are performing much better this academic year than in 2016. You acknowledged that work in books showed that some middle-ability pupils need greater challenge, and expectations for this group of pupils needs to be consistently high.
- In 2016, results in science for pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2 were below national figures. Following these disappointing outcomes, you and governors have strengthened leadership by appointing a new science coordinator. Work is already underway and the new leader is driving improvements across the school, including a complete review of how the curriculum is taught. Staff have developed an integrated approach to the curriculum, so that pupils are taught scientific skills through project work. The profile of science has also been raised considerably, including through recent workshops at the neighbouring secondary school for pupils in Year 5 and Year 6, as well as 'Science Week' where pupils have focused on scientific enquiry. Despite these developments, you and the school's leaders agreed with me that the school needs to improve its assessment systems so that pupils' progress in science is tracked with more rigour. You also agreed that there needs to be a more consistent approach to investigative work in science across the school, in order that pupils develop the necessary scientific skills and make faster progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- training further develops the skills of teaching assistants so that they are well equipped to deepen and extend pupils' learning
- the school continues to develop sufficient challenge for its middle-ability pupils
- the school continues to develop an effective system to assess pupils' progress and achievement in science
- pupils are given sufficient, regular opportunities to undertake practical investigative work in science, in order to develop the necessary scientific skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Damien Turrell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your special educational needs coordinator. I also met with four members of the governing body. You and I visited all classes during the inspection. I reviewed pupils' books during my visits and also looked separately at a sample of pupils' books. I considered information about pupils' learning and progress with you, your deputy headteacher and your special needs coordinator. I listened to pupils read from Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6, and talked to several pupils during playtime. I took account of 31 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire. I reviewed the school's website, and considered a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plans. I looked at safeguarding information and behaviour records. I looked at reports completed by governors, minutes of meetings and attendance figures. I considered nine responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and responses to Ofsted's online pupils' questionnaire.