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Miss Anne-Marie Strachan
Interim Headteacher
The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston
Wyberton Low Road
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Dear Miss Strachan

Short inspection of The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Thomas' is a school that places a high value on listening to its pupils and encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and for others. Pupils and staff are valued and speak openly of their pride in being a part of the school. Core values evident in classes and around the school encourage pupils to show compassion, respect each other and be resilient in all that they do. Pupils are expected to work hard and they do. As a result, your pupils achieve well across subjects and classes and enjoy talking about their learning. Parents are highly supportive of the school and value the 'lovely welcoming atmosphere'.

You have successfully addressed the sole recommendation of the previous inspection to raise the quality of the ICT provision in the school. Your investment in computers and new technologies is evident throughout the school. Pupils are confident and proficient in using digital equipment to enhance and extend their learning and have an excellent understanding of how to do this safely.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and you place a strong focus on all aspects of their personal development and welfare. St Thomas' is a very caring school where adults go the extra distance to make sure that every child is cared for and is safe. The pupils themselves speak about equality and show a mature understanding of the importance of accepting others' differences. Pupils continue to benefit from the varied array of interesting and well-planned activities across subjects.

Your leadership team is strengthened by the partnership with Wyberton Primary School in the Great Oaks Federation. You have used this skilfully to share expertise across both schools and carry out joint training and moderation activities. This has strengthened the leadership in key subjects, such as mathematics, and also provides valuable support and development for new leaders.

You have made effective use of external reviews to look more closely at how mathematics is taught and to identify clear actions to improve outcomes in mathematics so that more pupils reach and exceed new expectations. Clear actions are being taken to address achievement in mathematics and teachers make it clear to pupils that they must be prepared to explain their chosen methodologies when resolving problems. Your assessment information shows that this is having a positive impact for pupils in key stage 2 classes.

Members of the governing body have insightful knowledge and understanding of your school. They have acted quickly to support staffing changes so that expertise is shared across the schools. Governors made sure that time allowed from the start of your appointment facilitated a smooth transition and handover, so that the everyday life of the school was undisturbed. The support and sharp challenging questions raised by governors enable you to keep a close eye on actions in place to drive achievement for all groups of pupils in mathematics.

The enthusiasm and passion of your leadership team is shared by staff and communicated to pupils in the school. Pupils enjoy being a part of the school and are confident and articulate in expressing their views. They appreciate the support and guidance which you give them and emulate the high expectations modelled by staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on safeguarding and ensure that it is at the heart of all of the school's work. Detailed and thorough records are meticulously kept and routinely updated. Rigorous checks are made on staff suitability to work with children and governors' monitoring shows their excellent awareness of their own statutory responsibilities. Your extended team of safeguarding leaders ensures that there is always a senior member of staff at hand, should a concern be raised. Staff training is kept sharply up to date and new staff or any who have missed training events are quickly included in follow-up sessions run in school. This ensures that staff are confident in the systems used to raise concerns.

Pupils are actively involved in keeping themselves and others safe, particularly when using the internet. Being safe online is mentioned daily. Pupils are exceptionally well informed and aware of the potential perils online. Digital leaders champion safe use of the internet and frequently lead assemblies and address parents in school. This maintains a high focus on safety for every pupil in St Thomas'.

The school's support for the most vulnerable pupils is exceptional. Pupils say that

they feel safe and openly echo the view that every pupil is treated equally, regardless of their differences. Pupils show great understanding and empathy for others and exercise tolerance if one of their peers is struggling with worries or emotional issues. Leaders know pupils and their families well and are quick to put in support where a concern about a pupil is raised.

Inspection findings

- Your leadership team and governing body have a clear and focused view of the school's key priorities. There is a shared strategic vision for raising standards in mathematics and ensuring that pupils achieve their very best. The partnership with Wyberton Primary School and external support through peer review work has raised your determination to achieve excellence in all aspects of your work.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is more carefully monitored and staff now have a deeper understanding of the new curriculum content and how to assess accurately what pupils can do. Teachers understand what is required to reach beyond the expected standard and their lessons and plans reflect this. Pupils are actively encouraged to explain their understanding and as a result, your assessment information shows that standards are rising in mathematics. This change is still in its early stages and requires more time to become securely embedded and fully have an impact on pupils' achievements.
- You are relentless in your checks on the attendance of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. The learning mentor has developed strong relationships with many of your families and understands where complex issues have affected individual attendance. She is rigorous in identifying potential dips and quick to make contact with parents and carers to offer help and bring pupils into school. Regular home visits are in place and your team tailors solutions to support individual pupils and their families. This has raised the attendance for this group of learners and reduced the number of persistent absentees to below the national figure.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are continually encouraged to explain how they solve problems in mathematics so that their knowledge and understanding deepens and more pupils reach the mastery level.

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

Aune Turkson-Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met regularly along with the head of school, and observed teaching in several classes together. We looked at pupils' work from different subjects while in lessons and I spoke extensively to pupils about their work and experiences in school, throughout the day. I met with two members of the governing body, including the chair, and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with a group of pupils who hold specific responsibilities and also with the senior learning mentor who is one of the safeguarding leaders in the school. Subject leaders were available to talk about their areas and what impact they are having on raising standards further, especially in mathematics. I reviewed records of checks on staff suitability to work with children, as well as records of recruitment. I spoke with parents outside school and took note of their views through a recent school survey and through the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. All of my discussions were focused around the lines of enquiry that were formed to test whether the school remains good. I checked the effectiveness of safeguarding and what impact the school is having on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.