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Mrs Sarah Lyons
Headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lyons

Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Through your dynamic leadership, you have established a clear vision for the school. This is shared by governors, staff and pupils. The local governing body has supported the school well. You have worked closely with the academy trust to ensure that the school continues to improve. The school clearly benefits from the effective support and opportunities the trust provides.

The caring ethos in your school is a thread running through all aspects of school life. Pupils are proud of their school and they show respect and consideration for each other and their teachers. Leaders and other teachers run the school with its pupils at the centre. Teachers are skilled and enthusiastic, and consistently promote the school's values. Pupils have an excellent 'can do' attitude to their work. This is as a result of your work to develop the '6 Rs' and innovative initiatives such as the promotion of a 'growth mindset'. One child said, 'When I find something tricky, I keep going!'

Behaviour is excellent and pupils conduct themselves impeccably throughout the school day. They apply themselves to their work enthusiastically. Pupils confidently offer eloquent contributions to class discussions.

You have successfully tackled many of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Middle leaders are having increasing impact on the work of other

staff. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. Leaders are developing the curriculum further.

The new 'mastery' approach to the teaching of mathematics was fully implemented throughout the school last year. The impact of this work was not fully reflected in pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. The work of current pupils, including that of boys, however, shows they are rapidly improving their problem-solving and reasoning skills. Children's achievement in the early years and key stage 1 is very strong. The most able pupils are usually given work which challenges them. Occasionally, though, teachers do not match the work well to pupils' needs. The standard of pupils' writing is sometimes let down by inconsistent presentation and poor spelling. Leaders are aware of this issue and plan to remedy this.

You and the other staff provide many opportunities for pupils to learn about and broaden their understanding of the wider world. You have established links with schools that are very different in context, and you visit some of them. This helps pupils to understand similarities and differences in the lives and outlooks of others. Your review of the curriculum has drawn effectively on the work of the United Nations Children's Fund. It has improved pupils' understanding of difference and diversity. Changes have involved school visitors, assembly themes and enrichment activities. These have clearly stimulated pupils' thinking, because some pupils said they wished they could learn more about politics.

Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate. Improvement plans and the management of teachers' performance focus on relevant targets to raise standards. The local governing body, however, does not understand the progress of different groups of pupils in enough depth. This means that governors are not as effective as they could be in holding leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. The school makes thorough recruitment checks. You, the trust and the governing body check the arrangements regularly to make sure they are working well. Record-keeping is thorough.

Systems and procedures for recording concerns are robust. Leaders take timely action where appropriate. Staff undertake regular child protection and safeguarding training. Induction processes ensure that new members of staff are fully aware of school policies and how to keep pupils safe. All staff and governors have had training and are aware of their responsibilities. Not all, however, have had the training to ensure that communications are consistent.

Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for. They were emphatic that staff respond to and deal with any concerns they have. Pupils and leaders say bullying is extremely rare. Pupils spoke with confidence about how to keep themselves safe online. It is clear that the views of pupils are taken into account in many aspects of

the school's organisation. Some raised some thoughtful points about playtime and lunchtime arrangements, which leaders are aware of. The very large majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those who spoke with me are very happy with the school. They say their children are happy, the school is a safe place and their children make good progress.

Inspection findings

- The school's assessment information shows that, at the end of the last academic year, pupils at the end of the early years and key stage 1 reached above, and often well above, average standards. At the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was close to that seen nationally. Too few pupils, however, achieved greater depth in mathematics. Some pupils made slower progress in reading and mathematics from their starting points than they should have done, particularly those of average ability. School information and work in pupils' books show that the large majority of pupils currently in key stage 2 are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' written work is generally of a high standard. Teachers have inconsistent expectations of the quality of pupils' presentation in English and other subjects, however. Standards of spelling are too low.
- Teachers are skilled and enthusiastic. They have good subject knowledge and ask questions which probe and promote pupils' thinking. Pupils work well together and share their ideas confidently. Teachers actively promote independence and resilience, so pupils persevere in their learning. Teachers do not, however, consistently check pupils' understanding to decide when they can move learning on or ensure that they match work well to pupils' needs. This means the progress of some pupils is not consistently as rapid as it could be.
- Pupils' work shows clear impact of the new mathematics 'mastery' curriculum. Pupils regularly engage in problem-solving activities and tasks in which they explain their thinking and develop their reasoning skills. Leaders expect that teachers will refine this approach as they continue to develop their expertise.
- The local governing body is committed and governors show good overall understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are not, however, as secure as they could be in their understanding of pupils' attainment and progress.
- Processes for managing the performance of teachers are robust and linked to pupils' attainment and progress, which is helping to drive improvement.
- Staff consistently reinforce the school's ethos and values. This creates a purposeful atmosphere for learning that is reflected in pupils' behaviour and dispositions. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and school life. These are also reflected in the rich range of displays in classrooms, corridors and on the playground.
- The attendance for pupils overall, as well as for disadvantaged pupils, improved in 2017 compared to the previous year. Attendance rates are higher than those seen nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching enables all pupils in key stage 2, including those of average ability, to make accelerated progress so more achieve at greater depth, particularly in mathematics
- teachers have high expectations in all subjects for the quality of pupils' presentation of their work and the accuracy of spelling
- governors deepen their understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils in different subjects so the local governing body can more effectively hold the school to account.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lawson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher of the Rutland Learning Trust and a middle leader. He also met with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body. The inspector spoke with parents at the beginning of the day. He met with pupils informally at breaktimes as well as with a group of pupils. The inspector observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, at lunchtime and between lessons.

The inspector visited six lessons, jointly with the headteacher. During these visits, the inspector looked at pupils' work and spoke with them to evaluate the quality of their learning. He also examined the work in a sample of pupils' books. The inspector scrutinised a variety of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' attainment and progress, staff performance and leaders' plans for improvement. The inspector considered the 47 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as a staff questionnaire. The inspector assessed the impact of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection.