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Mrs Ashley Best-White
Executive Headteacher
Old Catton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School
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Dear Mrs Best-White

Short inspection of Old Catton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Old Catton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School is part of a federation of two schools. As executive headteacher of the school and White Woman Lane Junior School, you use shared arrangements to successfully benefit both.

Governors have ensured that your role at Old Catton is strengthened by a skilful and effective head of school, the federation's executive deputy headteacher, and the executive deputy headteacher for special educational needs and disabilities. You and your leaders work effectively together to provide the school with strong and purposeful leadership. Along with governors, you identify accurately the school's strengths and act with determination to address any weaknesses. Staff, governors and pupils share your ambition and aspiration to keep raising standards. This is enabling the school to continue on its journey of ongoing improvement.

As well as having the advantages of being within a federation, the school also works in partnership with a group of local schools. This provides further opportunities to strengthen provision. Joint work between these partnership schools means that

teachers are able to see and share the best practice. They are also able to check their assessments of pupils, and this contributes well to improvement planning.

As executive headteacher, you have successfully developed an ethos for the school that staff, governors and pupils share. The school's motto, 'love, hope, joy', is interwoven into the work of the school. Pupils understand the importance of these values. As one pupil explained to me, 'it's how you should behave to each other to make the school a nice place to be.'

There is much for pupils to look forward to at the school. The curriculum is enriched with many visits and experiences so that pupils can develop in all areas of learning. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 4 were taking part in a cycling competence and safety course on the playground and Year 5 pupils were in the hall rehearsing their version of a Shakespearian play for a public theatre performance later in the school year. Another group of pupils were visiting a local school to work with some ex-veterans on a range of practical challenges to develop their confidence and resilience. Pupils were keen to tell me that 'there are loads of different things going on, so there's lots to look forward to.' They added, 'there are lots of activities to help us improve in lots of ways.'

Parents recognise the good work you do for their children and appreciate the many opportunities you provide. Almost all parents confirmed that their children enjoy school and make good progress. One parent summed up the views of many by stating, 'our children are heard, feel safe, respected and valued, they are encouraged to flourish and thrive, and to achieve greatness.'

You, the leadership team and governors have acted successfully on the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Our joint visits to lessons, including a scrutiny of pupils' work, and the school's assessment information from the previous academic year demonstrate that pupils make good progress in writing. Pupils write at length, in a range of styles and sustain a good quality of writing. Books and classroom displays show interesting topics and prompts to encourage pupils to write for different purposes. Teachers skilfully ask questions to check pupils' understanding and give them clear feedback so that they know how to improve their work further. As one pupil said, 'our teachers guide us so we understand more. It helps us to improve.'

Another area for development from the previous inspection was to make sure that teaching assistants are well deployed to support and challenge pupils in their learning more consistently. You ensure that teaching assistants receive appropriate training and professional support to improve their practice. During the inspection, teaching assistants were seen modelling language and questioning pupils appropriately to improve pupils' work, and providing individualised support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, teaching assistants' work now contributes more effectively to improving pupils' learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, governors and staff work hard to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff receive regular and helpful training to ensure that they know their safeguarding duties. Rigorous checks are carried out on all adults who work or volunteer at the school. Leaders work with experts beyond the school to provide specific support for families of individual pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Leaders keep high-quality records of this work and review its effectiveness regularly.

Pupils say that they feel happy, safe and settled in school. They told me that they enjoy coming to school and are 'very proud to be here'. Additionally, pupils told me that they know how to keep safe, especially when using the internet. Pupils also say that there is no bullying, and that they can talk to any adult in the school about any worries they may have. Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and at breaktimes. This is due to the positive relationships they have with staff and the high standards of behaviour that all staff consistently expect of them.

Inspection findings

- I identified some lines of enquiry to check that the school remains good. We agreed these at the beginning of the inspection. First, I considered how leaders are ensuring that the quality of teaching in mathematics is high and that, from their starting points, pupils achieve well in mathematics. This is because the most recent unvalidated results for 2017 show that pupils at the end of Year 6 did not achieve as highly in mathematics as they did in reading and writing. The standards pupils reached in mathematics were below the national average. This was disappointing to you and your leaders, and not indicative of the upward trend of their progress over time.
- You, the leadership team and governors made this a priority for current improvement plans. You took swift action to analyse the results to look for any gaps in pupils' learning, check the quality of teaching and put necessary steps in place to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Your own evaluations found that the teaching of mathematics is effective. Furthermore, work in pupils' books from the previous academic year showed that pupils made strong progress in mathematics. You also commissioned external specialists to review teaching and learning in mathematics. They confirmed your findings that the provision, and achievement in pupils' books, is strong.
- During our joint observations of mathematics lessons, I saw effective, high-quality teaching with some strong features. Pupils were investigating numbers and number patterns, including interpreting negative numbers. I observed that teachers give pupils a range of problems of increasing difficulty and teach pupils strategies to help them to solve these. When we looked at pupils' current books and those from the previous academic year, I saw a range of calculation activities and more challenging problem-solving tasks that successfully extended and deepened pupils' knowledge and understanding. Their books demonstrate good progress in mathematics, even though the standards pupils achieved for 2017

were below the national average for pupils achieving both the expected and higher standards.

- You have concluded that in raising the profile of reading and writing in the school and significantly improving pupils' achievement in these subjects, you have not given an equal focus to mathematics. As a result, pupils sometimes lack confidence to apply their mathematical skills in more challenging and varied problem-solving tasks in other subjects. You, staff and governors are already working with pupils to address this.
- Another line of enquiry was to check how well you and your leaders ensure that the needs of the most able pupils are being met, so that they make rapid progress and attain well. Outcomes in 2016 and the most recent unvalidated results for 2017 show that the proportion of pupils attaining higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics was broadly average. You have already identified that the most able pupils are not always challenged to reach their potential in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, and that expectations of what these pupils can achieve need to be raised across the curriculum.
- You have introduced a range of effective support to help the most able pupils achieve well. A group of most able pupils spoke enthusiastically about how teachers challenge them in reading and writing, and help them to think deeply in their lessons. However, pupils also told me that when they are being taught other subjects: 'Sometimes the work is a bit easy. Teachers explain the whole thing again and we don't need that.' You acknowledge that there is scope to ensure that teachers always offer the right level of challenge in all subjects and avoid providing repetitive work for the most able pupils to complete before moving on to more demanding tasks.
- Finally, I looked at rates of attendance and, specifically, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Although pupils' overall attendance is positive and above national figures, the published information in 2016 showed that, as a group, disadvantaged pupils had particularly high rates of absence. I scrutinised the school's attendance information for this small group of pupils. This demonstrated that most of these pupils attended school well. Only a very few pupils who, for more complex reasons, were regularly absent had affected the overall figures.
- The attendance of all pupils is prioritised. There are a range of appropriate measures in place to ensure that all pupils attend regularly. You and other leaders take a direct role in addressing any attendance issues. You identify any barriers to pupils attending school. In addition, the school's parent support adviser provides practical help to families to reduce these barriers. You also use a range of activities to promote vulnerable pupils' social and emotional well-being and enable them to engage more positively in their learning. As a result, the school's attendance information for the previous academic year is more positive and shows that all pupils' attendance, including the disadvantaged pupils, is improving and no pupils are held back by low attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- raise achievement and increase pupils' confidence in mathematics, so that they achieve as well as they do in reading and writing, by providing more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills and understanding across the curriculum
- ensure that teachers consistently challenge the most able pupils in other subjects as well as they do in reading and writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings were held with you, the head of school, the executive deputy headteacher and the executive deputy headteacher for special educational needs and disabilities. I met with governors, including the chair of governors, and also the local authority adviser.
- We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' attendance, progress and attainment.
- I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations of teaching and learning in classes with you and the executive deputy headteacher.
- We looked at a sample of pupils' current work and their work from the previous academic year across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- The views of 27 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 26 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the school's own recent parent survey, which included the views of 42 parents.