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Miss Paula Greatrex and Mrs Ann Gaze
Headteachers
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Dear Miss Greatrex and Mrs Gaze

Short inspection of Thundridge Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Thundridge Church of England Primary is a small school with a warm, friendly ethos. Many parents I spoke to informally at the start of the day were effusive in their praise for the school. Typical comments included, 'this is a wonderful school', and, 'the recent parents' evening gave us great confidence that the new teachers already know the children well'. These views were endorsed by the majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and by texting their positive perceptions of the school. Many parents recognise the improvements you have made to bring stability to the school staff. However, some families told me that instability last year did take longer than they would have liked to be resolved.

A number of new governors have been appointed recently and a new chair of governors, an experienced educational professional, is in post.

You have led the school through a period of transition with some important staff changes which have improved teaching, particularly in early years and key stage 1. Recently, you have been working hard to ensure that teachers offer some pupils a higher level of challenge in mathematics, particularly at key stage 2. You have also started to give a higher priority to improving pupils' attendance. Your plans show

that you know there is still work to be done to fully achieve your aims.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around school, and they show respect and courtesy to staff and visitors. They are interested in their learning and they work diligently to present their work carefully and meet teachers' expectations. Teachers provide clear explanations so that pupils understand what is expected of them in lessons.

Outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 2 have been consistently strong in reading and writing in recent years. However, in 2017, a very small number of pupils did not do as well in their mathematics tests as expected. Because there were only 12 pupils in the cohort, this resulted in published performance information that was lower than expected. You quickly identified this issue and you have already started to take action. You are implementing a detailed plan for continuing to improve the school, which you review regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records of staff's suitability to work with children are detailed and of good quality.

You and the governing body ensure that staff are kept up to date with safeguarding requirements. Staff know their duties and understand their role in keeping pupils safe. They are well equipped to identify when pupils may be at risk of harm. Safeguarding records are securely maintained and include comprehensive information about how you follow up any concerns. You seek appropriate advice and support from other professionals when the need arises.

The pupils I spoke to told me that they feel safe at school. They consider bullying and bad behaviour to be rare events and they are confident that any member of staff, not just their teachers, will listen to them if they have concerns. An overwhelming majority of parents agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at the school.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in mathematics. Outcomes in 2017 suggested that some pupils, particularly those of middle ability and the most able, had not made enough progress in key stage 2. You agreed, and told me that your leadership team had already identified improving outcomes in mathematics as a key priority for the school.
- On visiting classrooms, and looking at pupils' work and your assessment information, it became clear that there is plenty of effective mathematics teaching taking place, but there is also scope to offer more challenge to some pupils. In some classes, teachers are introducing more tasks that require pupils to use mathematical reasoning to solve problems. We agreed that all teachers need to share the same high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Your aim

is that all pupils regularly undertake work which requires them to think hard and apply a variety of mathematical skills to solve a range of problems in order to deepen their understanding.

- You have also introduced new approaches to mathematics teaching through regular, guided mathematics lessons. You have changed the timetable so that older pupils now spend more time each day on mathematical activities. You have also introduced additional opportunities for pupils to develop their mental arithmetic skills, including making good use of additional time. You have undertaken a thorough analysis of pupils' responses to recent tests and this has enabled you to identify some specific areas of mathematics, including algebra, ratio and proportion, which require more focused teaching.
- You have introduced more frequent meetings between senior staff and class teachers in order to review the progress of every child in mathematics. Governors understand how to use this information to keep a close eye on pupils' mathematical achievement. Governors also understand the importance of asking challenging questions to senior leaders, and taking swift action if pupils are not doing well enough.
- I asked you to continue to ensure that mathematics remains a key priority for improvement and you agreed how important this is.
- My second line of enquiry was about attendance. You are aware that some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are absent too frequently and too many pupils are persistently absent. You have recently written to parents to explain the importance of regular attendance and the difficulties of securing high-quality learning if pupils are not in school. You told me that you do not authorise holidays in term time unless exceptional circumstances apply, and that you are considering how best to use rewards and sanctions to maximise attendance.
- My third line of enquiry was about the curriculum, including the use of the physical education (PE) sport premium grant. There is some useful information on the school's website about the curriculum, but we agreed that there is scope to add more detail so that parents can understand more clearly what pupils are learning in lessons.
- Children learn about history, geography and science through topic work and you have developed a clear set of plans to ensure that pupils access the full curriculum in their mixed-year classes.
- The subject leader for PE ensures that the PE and sport premium grant is used well. Last year, for example, pupils had the chance to participate in archery, hula hooping and korfbal. Pupils volunteer to be young leaders and they help to organise lunchtime playground games. Pupils who are sports ambassadors recently attended a training course to introduce speed stacking as a school club.
- My final line of enquiry was about provision and leadership in early years. In 2015 and 2016, the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception had been below the national average. In addition, there was a lack of continuity in early years last year, due to staffing problems. Parents expressed their concerns about the situation. You, along with

other senior leaders and governors, took effective action to improve the situation.

- As a result of the provision you put in place, children in early years made good progress in their learning last year, so that in the most recent assessments, 75% of the children achieved a good level of development. This was above the national average for the first time in three years.
- Evidence from my visits to the early years classroom confirmed that provision in early years is extremely effective. Children displayed positive learning behaviour in a variety of environments. Learning activities were carefully structured to meet children's needs and appeal to their interests.
- The early years leader ensures that other adults in the setting make a strong contribution to learning and assessment. The strong focus on ensuring that activities are designed to help children become as independent as possible in their play and learning is a strong feature of the environment.
- The early years leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths of the current provision. She also has a clear plan for further improvements in order to enhance outcomes for children in the expressive arts and design area of the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, especially middle- and higher ability pupils in key stage 2, are provided with more opportunities to undertake mathematical work which requires them to apply their reasoning and calculation skills, to ensure that pupils' progress and outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are consistently strong and that more pupils reach the highest standard possible
- steps are taken to reduce absence, including persistent absence, by promoting the benefits of good attendance and by taking robust action where necessary.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Rudman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I also met the leaders who have responsibility for early years provision and the use of the PE and sport premium grant to discuss outcomes for children and pupils and the impact of decisions leaders have made. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, a parent governor and the new safeguarding governor. I spoke on the phone to a representative from Herts For Learning, who has been providing useful advice to the school. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your records of monitoring and evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's assessment information for all year groups. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. We undertook joint observations of learning across the school, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons.