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Mrs Zoe Batten
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Batten

Short inspection of Dolton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school is one of two in the Tarka Federation. Changes to the leadership of the federation since the previous inspection include your appointment as executive headteacher, and the formation of an interim executive governing board. A deputy headteacher has also been appointed to work across both schools in the federation. You have quickly established a climate of high expectations and aspiration for all. Staff and parents express their confidence in the school, and in its positive journey of improvement.

You have supported staff to embrace the opportunities afforded through the school's links with the North Devon Teaching School Alliance. Working with Woolacombe Primary School, a national support and teaching school, staff have access to high-quality training. This is strengthening key aspects of teaching, including the accuracy of assessment and planning for mixed-age classes. It is also beginning to help staff to develop the skills and knowledge needed to carry out middle leadership roles. Staff have welcomed the opportunity to share ideas and to learn from others. Improvements in teaching have secured better progress for pupils this year in all year groups.

The school's ethos is characterised by the '5Rs' of 'risk, resilience, reflectiveness,

resourcefulness and reciprocity'. These qualities are threaded through the school's curriculum to equip pupils with the personal skills that support their capacity to learn well. Pupils enjoy their time at school. They are confident that they are both challenged and supported by teachers and teaching assistants. You and all staff lead by example. Relationships are based on trust and respect and are supportive and productive. These expectations make a significant contribution to pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their good social skills that ensure that they enjoy working and playing together.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection. Teachers encourage pupils to talk about their learning, to persevere even when they find activities challenging, and to constructively evaluate their own work. As a result, pupils have a much improved understanding of their own learning, and what they need to do next to make their work better. Teachers take the time to discuss pupils' work with them, to unpick any difficulties they may have, and to provide them with specific guidance that enables them to improve. Pupils are confident that the assistance they receive helps them to learn well.

The significant investment in new books for the school library and the introduction of an online reading programme have made a significant positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of reading. Staff promote reading strongly, both as a pleasurable activity and as the key to learning in other subjects. Pupils have welcomed the opportunity to read a wider range of books. You provide clear, supportive information for parents about the school's approach to teaching reading and how they can help their children at home.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training so that they fully understand recent legislation and their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. They are vigilant and are alert to any potential dangers to pupils. Your high-quality records are detailed and well maintained. You work very constructively with other professionals. The timely sharing of information ensures that pupils and their families receive appropriate guidance and support quickly.

Parents recognise the school's close 'family feel' and are confident that their children are safe and well looked after. 'I am leaving them in a safe, nurturing environment' was typical of the positive views expressed by parents. You promote strongly the benefits of developing trusting, supportive relationships. This provides pupils with a good foundation on which to build caring friendships and to manage personal risk well. Pupils of all ages enjoy each other's company and take care of each other. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to explore how to keep themselves safe in a range of circumstances, including when using modern technology. Pupils behave well and report that there are very few incidents of poor behaviour but, if they do happen, adults deal with them quickly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- The progress made by pupils in mathematics in key stage 2 has been variable over the past three years. We agreed that, in part, the variation in pupils' performance has been linked to the challenge of planning for a mixed-age class. High-quality training has secured much improved procedures for assessing pupils' knowledge and skills. This information is used well to make sure that planning takes account of the very differing needs of pupils in the mixed-age class. This better match of work is ensuring that pupils' learning is progressing at a faster rate this year.
- The strong emphasis on using practical resources is helping pupils to be more secure in their mathematical understanding. Additionally, helping pupils to recall number facts quickly and accurately is supporting the speed of their calculation. Pupils' confidence and competence have improved in this aspect although more remains to be done to ensure that their skills are fully secure. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their mathematics work and to explain their thinking. They work hard to achieve this although organising their thoughts in a coherent way is a challenge for some. You recognise that there is more to do to ensure that pupils are able to articulate their mathematical reasoning quickly and clearly. Links made to other subjects are helping pupils to see the relevance of their learning in mathematics. For example, as part of their 'harvest' project pupils estimated how many vegetables a farmer will produce and the income that will be generated once they are sold.
- We also agreed that I would look at how well pupils in all year groups use their phonic knowledge to support their learning in reading and writing. In early years and key stage 1, pupils get off to a good start. They develop a secure understanding of letters and the sounds they represent and use this knowledge confidently when reading and writing. For example, when reading, pupils in Years 1 and 2 are quick to note the use of 'ph' making the 'f' sound in 'elephant'.
- Pupils in key stage 2 continue to use their knowledge and skills well when reading. Pupils' spelling, however, has not been good enough, with too few reaching the standard expected by the end of Year 6. You have been quick to implement a programme that helps pupils to build successfully on their strong key stage 1 performance. Pupils are making better progress this year but there is more to do to ensure that their spelling skills are secure in each key stage 2 year group. Providing pupils with the opportunity to write in other subjects is giving them a reason to write. Their engagement and productivity have improved as a result. You recognise this approach needs to be developed further to ensure that pupils fully understand the relevance of different forms of writing.
- Finally, we agreed that I would explore how well pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to achieve well. You and your special educational needs coordinator have a very thorough understanding of the varied and sometimes complex additional needs of this group of pupils. The help they receive is based firmly on an accurate assessment of their individual needs. This is fully understood by teachers and teaching assistants so the assistance they provide is well targeted. Support may include additional teaching through specific programmes designed, for example, to improve pupils' speech and language development. Some pupils have their work in lessons modified, others

receive help from specialists. The provision made is personalised, and can include support for pupils' personal, social and emotional well-being as well as for their academic progress. Assessment information held by the school shows that pupils typically make good progress from their starting points. Some parents, whose children are receiving additional support, expressed their appreciation of the close relationship they have with staff and their confidence in the school's provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in mathematics and writing quickens in key stage 2 by:
 - improving further pupils' rapid recall of number facts
 - ensuring that pupils can talk confidently about their mathematical reasoning
 - improving the accuracy of pupils' spelling
 - expanding further the opportunities for pupils to write in other subjects.
- middle leaders strengthen further their leadership skills through the high-quality training that is available.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Cogher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy and the special educational needs coordinator. I also talked to the two specialist leaders in education who provide training and support for the school. Two governors, including the chair of the interim executive governing board, met with me to discuss the actions taken since their appointment, and their aspirations for the school's future. I conducted a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. I took account of the 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views of parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. Responses to the staff and pupil questionnaire were considered as well as the views expressed by pupils at break and lunchtimes. Together we made visits to lessons and examined a sample of pupils' work in books. We scrutinised information about the progress pupils are making. I examined a range of written evidence including the school improvement plans, and attendance and safeguarding documentation.