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13 December 2017

Mrs Sarah Hutchinson
Executive Headteacher
Henshaw Church of England Voluntary Aided First School
Henshaw
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Dear Mrs Hutchinson

Short inspection of Henshaw Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your appointment as executive headteacher in June 2017 followed a period of turbulence within the West Tyneside federation of schools that required diocese and local authority intervention and support. As a result of this support, a temporary acting executive headteacher was appointed to manage the schools and stabilise teaching and learning. The size of the federation was reduced from four schools to two, and strong and effective governance was secured. While much was achieved, there remained weaknesses in teaching and learning which you have tackled swiftly and effectively since your arrival. You have wasted no time in establishing your strong vision for the future and your high expectations now permeate all aspects of school life. All staff are supportive of your leadership and they share your aspirations. This bodes well for the future.

Parents are equally supportive of your calm and purposeful leadership, which has turned the fortunes of the school around. Parents value the many opportunities they now have to be fully involved in the school. The parents who spoke to me at the end of the school day were complimentary of the changes you have made. They were particularly pleased with the new improved levels of communication. You are held in such high regard that one parent felt compelled to write to the governing body to express her gratitude at your appointment and leadership. Governors were

equally emphatic that the most important decision they had made was to appoint you.

You have secured an accurate evaluation of the school as a result of the thorough checks you make on teaching and learning and other aspects of the school's work. Together with governors, you have developed a clear and strategic plan for the future that plots key milestones for success over the next three years. Subject action plans supplement this and identify specific short-term improvement priorities. As a means of measuring success, you set challenging targets for pupils' achievement at the expected standards. These transfer into staff appraisal targets effectively. Although cohort sizes are too small to link targets to the achievement of key groups of pupils, you accept that setting targets for the proportion of pupils identified to reach the higher standard would sharpen your plan even further.

One of the improvements required from the previous inspection was to improve teaching in key stage 1, particularly in mathematics. You have tackled weak teaching successfully and appointed new staff to the school. At the same time, you have introduced a planning tool which enables teachers to plan for the progression of pupils' learning in mixed-age classes effectively. Teachers are clear about your expectations for them to plan for pupils' arithmetic fluency, reasoning and problem-solving. Your expectations to make practical resources freely available to support pupils' mathematical learning and understanding are now commonplace across all classes.

You have introduced a new approach to planning that has re-energised the wider curriculum and pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils learn through topics, which provide pupils with a meaningful context for their learning and make links between subjects appropriately. Each topic starts with a question that pupils have to research. This provides pupils with regular opportunities to apply their numeracy and literacy skills in other subjects. While you have invigorated the school's curriculum, there is more you want to achieve. Together with governors, you have exciting plans to develop pupils' skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics even further.

Children start school with skills that are typical for children their age. They quickly settle in because transition with the private nursery is effective and strong bonds are formed successfully with the children and their parents. This continues throughout the school. Pupils say they are happy and well cared for and parents endorse this.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on all aspects of safeguarding and have ensured that arrangements are fit for purpose, including for those times when you are present at your other school in the federation. You make rigorous checks on the suitability of all staff and volunteers to work with children. Regular training and updates ensure that all staff are fully aware of the important role they play in keeping children safe.

You have appointed an inclusion officer to work across the federation who ensures that the most vulnerable pupils receive appropriate guidance and support when they need it. Parents spoke eloquently to express how much they value the changes you have made and how 'truly inclusive' the school now is under your leadership.

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and have a good understanding of what bullying is in all its forms. From an early age, pupils know the importance of telling an adult, but pupils who spoke to me during the inspection were clear that bullying 'doesn't happen at Henshaw'.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to check the school's approach to the teaching of phonics because over time pupils' outcomes in the national Year 1 screening check have declined. Staff new to the school are following a consistent approach that includes listening to sounds, reading sounds and writing sounds. Actions and rhymes are used to reinforce pupils' acquisition of phonics skills and to support them to apply those skills independently. Regular assessments are completed to ensure that pupils are moved on in their learning when they need to do so. The teaching of phonics in the Reception class is ensuring that pupils' early phonics skills are secure. This provides a firm foundation on which to build subsequent knowledge successfully. Early signs would indicate that the decline in standards in the Year 1 screening check has been halted, because pupils' current assessment information for 2018 is already more positive.
- I also wanted to check the actions leaders are taking to ensure that pupils, particularly the most able pupils, achieve highly in writing and mathematics, because pupils' outcomes at the higher standards have been variable over time. You have introduced a new handwriting style, which is improving the presentation of pupils' work in books. At the same time, you also introduced a new approach to the teaching of writing that uses quality texts to provide examples of different styles of writing. Key features are identified for pupils to apply to their own writing, which they then edit and redraft to improve their finished piece. This is now common practice across the school. However, our review of pupils' books showed that while most pupils are working securely within age-related expectations, few pupils are developing their skills at the higher standards. We also noticed that pupils' knowledge of spelling rules and patterns is inconsistent. You agree that there is more to do to embed the new approaches so that more pupils can achieve highly.
- The new approach you have introduced for the teaching of mathematics is securing pupils' application of formal methods effectively. Pupils are equally confident to use practical resources to support their learning, and to reason and explain their answers confidently. However, the most able pupils are not made to think hard about their learning and grapple with more demanding activities routinely. You agree that there is still more to do to ensure that more pupils are able to reach the higher standards consistently.

- My final focus was to check the impact of the new leadership arrangements for the federated headship and governance. You bring great clarity and purpose to your leadership and have ensured an uncompromising focus on raising standards. You have strengthened the quality of teaching and learning in the school and, along with governors, have an unwavering commitment to ensuring that all pupils achieve highly. You have introduced subject leaders with responsibilities across both schools. While they play a role in monitoring and are securing greater consistency to teachers' practice, they are only recently appointed and need the time and support to drive through further improvements effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged to think more deeply about their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics, so they can reach the higher standards consistently
- pupils' knowledge and skills of spelling patterns and rules are strengthened, so they are increasingly accurate in applying them in their own work
- improvement plans are sharpened to reflect the proportion of pupils expected to reach the higher standards
- subject leaders are given the time and support to strengthen their role in school improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the impact of the actions you are taking to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding arrangements. We observed learning together in all classes and we talked to pupils about their learning and reviewed their work in books. I also held meetings with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I made telephone calls to the local authority's and diocese's school improvement advisers. I talked informally to pupils in classes and around school. I also talked formally with nine pupils and listened to them read. I

reviewed the provisional summer 2017 results in national assessment tests of pupils at the end of key stage 2. I also checked the assessment information of all other year groups, and groups of pupils for the last academic year. Account was taken of the seven responses from the Ofsted staff survey and nine responses to the pupils' survey. I spoke to parents at the end of the school day and their views were taken into account. The 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were also taken into account. A number of documents were scrutinised. These included a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed minutes from recent full governing body meetings and committee meetings.