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Mrs Naomi Weaver  
Headteacher  
The St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Thorpe on the Hill  
School Lane  
Thorpe-on-the-Hill  
Lincoln  
LN6 9BN

Dear Mrs Weaver

### **Short inspection of The St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Thorpe on the Hill**

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018, 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a clear understanding of the strengths of your school and the areas that require further development. The senior leadership team has shown that it is effective in improving the school. The governing body performs its strategic roles well and holds you firmly to account for pupils' achievement, particularly for that of the most disadvantaged. All leaders are determined to support their philosophy that every child meets their full potential and can be the best that they can be.

Pupils have access to a full range of exciting experiences in order to stimulate their interests, deepen their knowledge and develop their thirst for learning. Pupils are involved in outdoor learning, drama and the arts. They visit places of historical and social interest. Leaders take seriously the importance of educating the 'whole child'. Pupils said that they appreciate the opportunities that they receive. They also said how proud they are to attend the school, and that their teachers value their opinions, challenge and help them without doing the work for them.

Many parents and carers were keen to inform the inspector about how happy their child is and how much progress they make in their lessons. They particularly appreciate the expertise of the teachers and the many ways they are invited to be involved in the life of the school, including learning alongside their child. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View,

believe that their child is taught well and makes good progress, and they would recommend your school to others.

You explained to me that, since the previous inspection, there had been a period of turbulence for the school. This was a difficult time. It is clear that leaders' actions have been effective. The school community is upbeat, the profile of teaching is strong and the majority of pupils are attaining at levels above the national average in many of the subjects that they study.

You recognise that a greater proportion of pupils, particularly the most able and the disadvantaged, need to achieve at a greater depth, particularly at the end of key stage 2. Together we reviewed the actions in place. Teachers now use a range of strategies to help the most able pupils further develop their language and reasoning skills, including involvement in philosophical debate. Pupils receive daily opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to challenging problems. They are presented with a number of opportunities to develop their independent and extended writing. Although improving, not enough pupils are achieving at the higher levels, particularly in writing. You recognise that the pace of this improvement needs to accelerate.

You have conducted a close review of precisely why pupils, and particularly the most able pupils, are not yet making rapid progress in writing. Your conclusions are accurate. Pupils' progress through school is sometimes slowed because their skills and knowledge are not appropriately built on. You have introduced a new whole-school approach to writing. This new approach focuses on systematically building pupils' understanding of the skills of writing, including the understanding of grammar, accurate spelling and the effective editing of their own work. More attention is now paid to ensure that pupils have the skills needed to move successfully to the next stage in their writing development.

The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is much smaller than the national average. The vast majority of this pupil group are achieving as their starting points indicate they should. The governor with oversight of the impact of the pupil premium spending has an excellent grasp of the issues and works well with you in order to ensure that the additional help that disadvantaged pupils receive makes the difference needed. Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that the most able disadvantaged pupils achieve as they should. This is your intended next step.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You place a high priority on protecting all pupils. Yours is a positive and nurturing school. On the day of the inspection, parents were working alongside their children to learn about keeping safe when using the computer and other forms of social media. Together, they were learning about the many challenges of using new technologies appropriately and how to keep safe from harm. Parents said that they valued the range of opportunities, such as this, to be involved and to learn.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils' welfare and safety are robust. Staff training is regular and appropriate. Actions to support the most vulnerable pupils take place in a timely manner. Pupils learn about a range of ways in which to keep themselves safe and healthy, including relationship education and ways in which they can eat healthily and enjoy exercise outdoors. Pupils said they feel that their school is a 'family' in which they are safe and happy.

### **Inspection findings**

- Governors provide effective support. They have a firm grasp on the strengths of the school and the areas for further improvement. They offer appropriate challenge to leaders. They have recognised the need to develop their expertise and are currently undergoing training to better understand assessment data. This positive step will help them to oversee pupils' progress effectively.
- School improvement planning is robust, is focused and has appropriate milestones for when actions should be completed. Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate.
- Leaders accept that, previously, there had been too much focus on attainment and not enough attention on pupils' progress, particularly in lower key stage 2. Their attention is now rightly on accelerating pupils' progress, particularly of the most able pupils who are in the majority in this school.
- Leaders often go the 'extra mile'. For example, parents were keen to say how much they valued the wide-ranging efforts taken to set parents' minds at rest during a recent school trip to London. Some parents, however, still believe that aspects of leaders' communication could further improve.
- You told me that in this rural community a small school can often feel isolated. You value the partnerships with local schools and have evidence of the impact of these. For example, teachers' assessments at each key stage and in the early years have been judged as accurate. You rightly recognise the need for high-quality school improvement partnerships in order to support the continuing success of the school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue the work to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils achieve at a greater depth at the end of key stage 2
- continue the work to ensure that pupils learn the skills needed to write confidently and independently at the level their starting points indicate they should
- continue to work with parents in order to further communicate the actions that take place to support pupils' progress and well-being
- ensure that leaders' capacity is further enhanced by high-quality school improvement partnerships and support.

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

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your senior leadership team and members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils and spoke with parents early in the school day. I considered the views of the 74 parents posted on Parent View. There were no responses to the pupils' survey or the staff survey. We conducted a scrutiny of Year 6 pupils' work across a range of subjects studied. We also reviewed the work of selected pupils in Years 2, 4 and 5. I evaluated a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, development planning, safeguarding records and policies.