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Mr Timothy Salvadori  
Headteacher  
Holsworthy Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mr Salvadori

### **Short inspection of Holsworthy Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 November 2012.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection, there has been a change in leadership. You began your role as the headteacher in January 2016, adding some much-needed stability. You quickly identified where improvements were necessary in order to improve the school's effectiveness. You have made some pivotal appointments to the leadership and teaching team, which have added both quality and fresh enthusiasm. There have also been significant changes to the governing body. Although the governing body is relatively newly formed, it has already added further challenge and support, which governors recognise had been missing previously. As a result, you now lead a team that wholeheartedly supports your high expectations and fully endorses your 'no excuse' culture. Parents also recognise the positive changes across the school.

Over the last few years, pupils' progress has been weak. This resulted in the proportion of pupils working at expectations for their age across key stages 1 and 2, being below national averages in 2015 and 2016. However, in 2017, this legacy of underachievement halted. Progress for pupils across the school greatly improved and the proportion of pupils working at expectations for their age increased. You acknowledge that further improvements are necessary, in particular for pupils in key stage 2 who have significant gaps in their learning due to weak teaching in the past.

In order to raise expectations and tackle underachievement, you have developed an

effective leadership team. They have an astute understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school and act effectively to bring about improvements. During the inspection, all leaders I spoke to were clear about how the school has improved. However, they are realistic about further work that is required to ensure that their interventions are effective in improving outcomes for pupils. You have also placed great emphasis on the consistency of the school's approach to teaching, learning and assessment, recognising that quality teaching is vital to improve outcomes for pupils. As a result, all staff receive regular training opportunities and are well equipped in their roles. You have galvanised the staff team in a short space of time; all feel valued and supported.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the lines of enquiry. These included considering how the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in key stage 1 ensures strong progress in mathematics, particularly for lower-attaining pupils. Secondly, I explored how teachers support pupils across key stage 2 to make strong progress, in particular lower- and higher-prior-attaining pupils. I also considered how the school's approach to the teaching of reading supports lower-attaining pupils in key stage 1 to read and also understand what they have read.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The culture of safeguarding across the school is strong. Recruitment processes are thorough and ensure that only those who are suitable to work with children are appointed. As each member of staff starts at the school, leaders ensure that they take part in a detailed induction process and are trained effectively to fulfil the school's approach to safeguarding pupils. Furthermore, leaders make sure that staff receive regular updates in child protection. Leaders have successfully cascaded the message of 'it can happen anywhere' and use case studies to alert staff as to how patterns of minor concerns about a pupil can often be indicative of wider, more serious concerns. As a result, staff know what to do when they have concerns about a pupil and communicate these effectively and in a timely manner.

When leaders have concerns about a pupil, they act effectively to ensure that the relevant external agencies are well informed. Subsequently, any decisions taken to prevent future risk are based on a comprehensive referral process. In some cases, leaders are not satisfied with the outcomes of the referral process and can demonstrate how their further actions have resulted in immediate involvement of other agencies. Although the culture of safeguarding is a clear strength, leaders acknowledge that improving pupils' attendance is urgently required.

### **Inspection findings**

- First, I considered how well lower-attaining pupils in key stage 1 are supported to make strong progress in mathematics. In the last two years, the proportion of these pupils who catch up by the end of key stage 1 has been lower than the national average. Pupils have access to a broad mathematics curriculum and all abilities are expected to develop their knowledge and understanding, and subsequently apply what they have learned to solve problems. Pupils are

confident in using resources to support their mathematical thinking. Although this is a strength, leaders recognise that lower-attaining pupils are, at times, too dependent on these resources, which limits their development and use of mental strategies.

- I looked at pupils' workbooks from Year 1 and 2 classes and considered how closely the activities met lower-attaining pupils' needs. In an attempt to understand what pupils can do, leaders have implemented an elicitation activity before the start of every unit. The intention is that teachers design subsequent lessons with pupils' prior knowledge in mind. While this was broadly the case, there are occasions where pupils do not find the work challenging enough. As a result, there are some lower-attaining pupils who do not have opportunities to catch up. Leaders acknowledge that, while the school's approach to teaching mathematics is broadly effective, there is a need for greater precision if pupils are going to make strong progress from their starting points.
- Secondly, I looked at how key stage 2 pupils are supported to make strong progress in reading, particularly those who are lower- or higher-attaining. In 2017, the progress made by middle-attaining pupils was particularly positive and showed a marked improvement from previous poor performance. While progress for middle-ability pupils improved, this was not as strong for lower- and higher-attaining pupils, which resulted in the proportions of pupils reaching expectations for their age and the higher standard being lower than national averages.
- Currently, a significant number of pupils in key stage 2 are working below expectations for their age and have significant gaps in their learning. Literacy leaders identified the need to ensure that pupils read frequently and receive timely support. Leaders also acknowledge that weaknesses in vocabulary development create a barrier for most pupils and have made informed changes to the curriculum to support improvements in this area. Although not yet seen in reading outcomes, the impact of these is evident in pupils' writing, where pupils are applying the vocabulary they have learned, more frequently and effectively.
- There has been an effective whole-school focus to promote a culture of reading. Pupils speak enthusiastically about reading and value the range of books available to them. The school library is a hive of activity and rarely vacant; pupils make regular use of the school library at breaktimes and lunchtimes to immerse themselves in their books. The school librarian plays a pivotal role in helping to deliver leaders' vision for reading, providing weekly reports to teachers about each pupil's involvement in reading activity, as well as ensuring that the book stock is current. Pupils read daily and their reading records show that they read a range of fiction and non-fiction books as well as a range of recognised, quality authors. Pupils' reading books are closely matched to their reading ability, ensuring that they are suitably challenged. As a result, pupils hold meaningful conversations with each other about a range of books they have read, as well as recognising what makes each author unique.
- In class, pupils continue to develop their reading through focused guided reading sessions which aim to further their comprehension skills and understanding. Staff question groups of pupils effectively, ensuring that pupils are challenged, while also maintaining pace and pupils' interest. Pupils who are not working with an

adult are equally focused. Although this approach to reading has taken root, it has not yet resulted in improving outcomes for pupils across key stage 2. Leaders acknowledge that lower-attaining pupils are yet to catch up with their peers, so that more pupils work at expectations for their age.

- Finally, I looked at how the teaching of reading supports pupils in key stage 1, particularly for those who were previously working below expectations for their age. Historically, key stage 1 reading progress had been poor, with many pupils leaving key stage 1 working below expectations for their age. However, in 2017, outcomes improved. Some lower-attaining pupils caught up by the end of key stage 1. As a result, there was a marked increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the standards expected for their age in Year 2.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has consistently increased over the last three years and, in 2017, exceeded national averages. Assessments of pupils are accurate and generally inform teaching sequences. As a result, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points and finish the phonics programme by the end of Year 1.
- The quality of phonics sessions varies across key stage 1. Where strongest, sessions were well paced, focused and intricate in design to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils in these sessions responded well to adult instruction and guidance, resulting in strong progress. Other sessions were not as well paced and the emphasis placed on phonics was diluted. In some cases, it was not always clear which stage of phonics development each pupil was working at, as activities did not match pupils' abilities. Pupils were decoding sounds from one aspect of the phonics programme while reading words from another. As a result, progress stalled for some pupils.
- I also looked at the opportunities that pupils have to apply their phonics knowledge when reading books. Where strongest, the phonics taught in the group activities are present in pupils' reading books. This provides effective opportunities for pupils to read words with the corresponding sounds they have been practising in their group sessions. However, this is not universally the case. As a result, the progress that pupils make in each session varies. Leaders recognise that the teaching of phonics requires more consistency.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current vocabulary and comprehension strategies are embedded so that more pupils across key stage 2 meet and exceed expectations for their age
- the teaching of phonics is consistent, so that activities are closely matched to the needs of pupils, and teachers provide pupils with suitable books which allow pupils to apply their knowledge of phonics
- teachers make better use of what they know pupils across key stage 1 can do and understand, to match activities so that more pupils by the end of key stage 1 are working at age-related expectations.

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

Nathan Kemp  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's context, current performance and the school's improvement plan. We observed lessons together and looked at a sample of pupils' workbooks. I also met with your literacy leaders and discussed the school's approach to the teaching of reading, as well as how they support those pupils who are working below expectations for their age. I met with your mathematics leader and, together, we looked at pupils' workbooks. I spoke with members of the school's governing body and the current school improvement partner. Finally, I met with the school librarian to discuss how successful the school's approach to promoting reading was in engaging pupils across the school.

I met with the team responsible for safeguarding across the school. I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children and training opportunities for staff. I also took account of 25 responses to the Ofsted's staff survey and 38 responses to the Parent View online survey.