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14 March 2018

Mr Chris Allen
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Allen

Short inspection of Sculthorpe Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 your predecessor 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 in spite of considerable changes in many aspects of the school. Sculthorpe joined the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academy Trust on 1 December 2015. The school's involvement in the local federation has grown since the previous inspection to include a third academy. Partnership with a local community school began in September 2016. As a result of these changes, you are now the executive headteacher of the federation, employing a full-time business manager and a head of school for Sculthorpe. Growth in pupil numbers required that you have an additional classroom built. You have put in place a flexible staffing structure to meet the needs of the increased number of pupils. All pupils are, therefore, taught in mixed-age classes, some bridging key stages. The governing body complement has also altered. Working with the trust, a new chair of governors was appointed in January 2017.

Sculthorpe is a welcoming school that parents, pupils and staff value. Pupils say that this is a 'fun and amazing school' and that they particularly 'like the support that we are given here'. Pupils eagerly arrive at the school with their parents, who are very supportive of you and your staff. Such comments from parents include that 'Sculthorpe is a lovely, friendly, close-knit school' where 'there is a palpable feel-good' ethos. Pupils are polite, respectful of each other and adults, and work well together in lessons, many helping each other even when they have not been asked to do so. You and your staff have ensured that pupils and parents and carers are supported in any way you can and inspired by the interesting topics you have

chosen for pupils to learn. Events such as 'stay and play', invitations to support readers in class and making good use of individual parents' skills and talents in after-school clubs are much welcomed by parents. Pupils say that they really enjoy the many after-school clubs, like archery, dodgeball and art. It is clear that such experiences are having an impact on pupils' aspirations. Many said that they would use their talents, for example as either a teacher, an illustrator or a dancer, others aspiring to be police officers, scientists or vets. 'You can be anything you want to be if you believe in yourself,' said one pupil.

Pupils like it when they receive a 'wow' award in assembly, or a merit mark when they have done well in their work. The values that you foster are illustrated throughout the school, but much more importantly are known to, and demonstrated by, pupils. They told me that this half term's value of 'compassion' means 'putting people before yourself' and 'putting yourself in their shoes'. The topics that the school has selected reinforce such values. Learning what it is like to 'walk the plank' as a naughty pirate was beautifully re-enacted by the younger children; older pupils wrote a persuasive petition to the 'discontented fish' to tell him to stop moaning and appreciate what he has; other pupils had been learning what it is like to be alive in Roman times. Wherever I visited during the inspection, pupils were excitedly involved in their learning, pleased to explain what they were doing and why, with the majority producing good-quality written work. For example, one Year 6 pupil wrote in her petition, 'Your haughty and aloof attitude makes us feel very upset and is causing children to copy you!' The artwork that dominates most shared and classroom spaces is of high quality and shows a great array of techniques while also demonstrating the work that you have done on developing a cross-curricular approach to learning. The pupils spoke animatedly about the work with 'the potty potter' and value the enterprise day that this local business provides for the school.

You have worked very hard to ensure that teachers are supported to give pupils the education they are entitled to, as you said, 'during the one chance they get in each year group'. You have cherry-picked training appropriate to the needs of individuals and the staff as a whole. Through the extensive menu of courses and opportunities to observe effective practice offered by the trust, you have improved teachers' planning for mixed-age classes, their confidence to deliver the mathematics curriculum, and competence in assessing pupils' written work. Sensibly, you have worked alongside other schools in the trust, federation and cluster to maximise the breadth of exposure that your staff in this small school get to the standards in other schools. As a result, teachers plan work that is increasingly appropriate for all pupils and the majority of current pupils are making good progress from their varying starting points. What is more, many pupils are involved in evaluating their own and each other's work. For example, in one class pupils voted on what was good about a pupil's work and what could be improved.

You and your governors have invested time in improving the way that you communicate with parents, ensuring that they have opportunities to voice their views through the parent forum. Despite the many changes in the school, parents are very pleased with your leadership and the progress that their children make. 100% of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said

that they would recommend the school to others. The increase in pupil numbers and the many texts that were received from parents reinforce their positive view of Sculthorpe.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is at the heart of the school's culture and ethos. Leaders, governors and the trust take their safeguarding roles seriously. They regularly audit the effectiveness of their safeguarding and child-protection procedures, highlighting any arising concerns.

You and your staff know your pupils and families well. You tenaciously follow up any concerns you have in a timely manner, liaising very effectively with external agencies such as the Family Support Process service, police and social services when necessary. As a result, pupils and families receive good support. On occasions you have gone above and beyond your daily responsibilities to ensure that individuals and their families are safe. You and your head of school have gained the confidence and trust of parents and pupils. As a consequence, pupils feel safe and parents say that their children are well cared for and happy at Sculthorpe.

Pupils know that bullying is 'being mean to someone a lot' and that it rarely occurs in their school. They also recognise, with maturity beyond their years, that not accepting others for who they are is a form of bullying. 'Everybody is different in different ways and you will make them feel unsure about themselves if you pick on them.' Pupils say that behaviour is largely good, which was confirmed during my visit.

Despite all of the work that you do to encourage pupils' regular attendance, there are still some pupils whose absence is high. You recognise that on some occasions this is unavoidable and you work closely with parents to support them. However, the majority of these pupils simply do not attend regularly. Governors and the trust are supporting the school to address this issue so that the school's absence figures decrease to be more in line with the national average.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I considered two key lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school remains good. These were discussed at our first meeting.
- My first line of enquiry related to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in key stage 2. This was because, in 2017, lower- and middle-ability pupils in Year 6 did not achieve as well as others nationally, and progress in mathematics was lower than in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard, however, was at least in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- I looked at learning across the school. In the majority of year groups learning was effective. Pupils worked well, both independently and in pairs, often skilfully directed by teachers to ensure that pupils thought hard about what they were learning. This was particularly so, for example, in the younger children's and

pupils' class. 'Anyone want to challenge yourself by using dice with higher numbers?' asked the teacher. Pupils responded eagerly. Adults in this class supported learning effectively by asking probing questions and ensuring that pupils and children understand what they are learning.

- Work in lower- and middle-ability key stage 2 pupils' books showed that the majority make good progress from their individual starting points. However, the school's own assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that, in one or two year groups, some pupils are not being challenged to achieve their best. When I spoke with pupils, they told me that their work in writing and mathematics is often too easy. Although teachers consistently use the coloured challenge system that you have put in place, too many pupils in those two year groups do not select work that challenges them sufficiently, nor are they moved on quickly in their learning when the adults spot this. Pupils want to have harder work that, as one pupil said, 'helps me to learn more'. What is more, many pupils still expect teachers to direct them to the 'right' challenge.
- My second line of enquiry was to see how well governors hold leaders to account for the effective use of additional funding to support the learning of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. This was because, over time, this small proportion of pupils have not always made as much progress from their individual starting points in reading, writing and mathematics as others nationally.
- Leaders quickly identify barriers to pupils' learning, which are many and varied. For example, on entry to the school, some children have low communication language and literacy skills; the most able disadvantaged pupils do not always achieve as well as they might because of social, emotional and mental health issues. Leaders ensure that governors receive regular updates on pupils' progress as a result of interventions that you have put in place. For example, the very youngest children have additional support with their early language skills. As a result, in 2017, these children's learning was accelerated so that they achieved what was expected of them in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Some pupils have play or drawing therapy. You have seen the impact of such provision, noting that these pupils are much readier to learn.
- The most able disadvantaged pupils throughout key stages 1 and 2 have been provided with opportunities to use the wider curriculum to practise their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, many of those identified pupils are making good progress from their starting points. You regularly track pupils' progress, identifying any gaps in their learning and putting in place support to address those areas quickly. The school's own assessment information for pupils currently in the school shows that the vast majority of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, or are disadvantaged, make good progress, and often better progress than their peers.
- Teachers largely deploy teaching assistants effectively. On several occasions during the inspection I observed teaching assistants gently questioning pupils about their learning, both on a one-to-one basis and when in a group. 'What do you think it would feel like under your feet if you were standing near the volcano when it erupted?' asked one teaching assistant of her small group during their

work on Romans. The result was that pupils used more effective words in their writing, such as 'rumbling' and 'terrifying'.

- Governors and the trust personnel regularly challenge leaders about pupils' progress. The collective expectation is that funding will be used effectively to improve the most vulnerable pupils' outcomes. For example, the cluster with which you work has changed the way that funding for pupils who have SEN is distributed. As a result, and because of pooling of resources across the cluster, you are more able to ensure that funding goes towards improved access to outside agencies and specialised support to meet current pupils' needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the existing effective practice in the school continues to support improvement in teaching, to ensure that pupils consistently achieve as well as they can in reading, writing and mathematics
- teachers routinely encourage pupils to think hard about what they are learning and challenge themselves to do even better
- absence and persistent absence of pupils reduce quickly so that the school's overall attendance is more in line with the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the director of education for the Diocese of Norwich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, your head of school and the subject leader for English. I also held meetings with the chair of governors and one other governor, along with the chief executive officer of the trust, the director of learning and the academy group executive principal assigned to Sculthorpe. You and I observed learning across all year groups. During that time, I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their English and mathematics books. Together with your head of school and English subject leader, I looked at pupils' work in their writing, mathematics and wider curriculum books. I met with a group of pupils formally to talk with them about their school experience. I also took into consideration the views of 12 parents, which included text messages, who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I viewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding, attendance, pupils'

progress, the curriculum, improvement plans and the self-evaluation document.