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Miss Fiona Bennett
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Miss Bennett

Short inspection of Husthwaite Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 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 October 2013.

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 your secondment to the school in January 2018, you have brought an ambitious, focused vision for the school, and for the federation as whole. You know what needs to be done to improve the school, and have identified many of these actions on the revised school improvement plan. However, it is early days, and it is too soon for all of these actions to have been set in motion, or to check their effectiveness. Governors, parents, carers, staff and pupils have confidence in your leadership and are committed to working together to make the school the best it can be.

Since the last inspection, many changes have taken place in leadership and staffing. Each class is taught by a different teacher this year. Some stability has been retained by teaching assistants. You are working closely with the governors and partners in the local authority and the diocese to establish the priorities for improvement and to celebrate the strengths of the school. You are honest and accurate in your view that aspects of teaching and learning need support and improvement, such as those for younger children and in phonics and writing.

Governors are passionate in their role and wholly committed to improvement. They

embrace opportunities for further development, such as the process of a pupil premium review and the local authority-led governor training and forums. They said that they have much better clarity of their roles, and a clear, shared vision with you. They have honest and focused discussions and are comfortable in supporting school leaders and challenging them too where necessary. Governors said that they would like more assessment detail about the progress and attainment of all pupils and of groups of pupils across the school and checkpoints along the way on the improvement plan. I agree that this information would support them in strengthening their work further.

At the last inspection, school leaders were asked to raise achievement in mathematics by making greater use of problem solving and practical mathematical opportunities to challenge pupils' learning. Leaders' successful work to address this can be seen in the stronger outcomes at the end of key stage 2 and pupils' current work in Year 2 to Year 6. Teachers' and teaching assistants' attention to giving pupils opportunities to develop fluency in their number work and then apply these skills to reasoning and problem solving activities are apparent in pupils' work and in discussions with them about their learning. Pupils confidently share their thoughts with each other in class and test out their ideas. For example, during my visit, groups of pupils were involved in estimating weights of products and checking their answers, and weighing ingredients accurately to make cakes. The misconceptions of a group converting grams to kilograms were quickly spotted and addressed by the teacher, ensuring that pupils developed a clear understanding and made progress in the session. Older pupils were seen making choices in tasks that gradually increased in difficulty, guided carefully and positively by their teacher if the task proved too easy or too challenging. The lead teacher for mathematics knows that clearer assessment systems and a focus on challenging pupils who are working at higher standards are the next steps for improvement.

Leaders were also asked to make better use of tracking information to identify pupils' next steps in learning at the last inspection. This is something you know needs to be better addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the interim headteacher and designated safeguarding leader for the school, you have made sure that you have quickly got to grips with the current systems for safeguarding in the school. You have made some changes to strengthen arrangements, such as the way in which pupils exit the building safely at the end of the school day. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are aware of procedures for identifying and reporting concerns. There are clear logs of staff training, which are up to date, and systems for effective information sharing. Case files show effective work with external agencies where it is needed.

Pupils are taught different ways to keep each other safe. They said that they feel safe at school and would tell an adult if they did not. They explained how the Playground Squad keeps everyone happy and safe at playtimes by organising

activities. They were able to give me very clear instructions about what to do if there was a fire alarm.

Inspection findings

- There has been fluctuation in phonics results over time, lower results in writing and recent lower outcomes for children at the end of early years. I was interested to see how well phonics teaching develops pupils' skills in reading and writing. You are right in your view that current pupils are not making strong enough progress in phonics. Adults do not use clear enough routines in phonics to engage pupils, give them confidence in making responses, or to develop effective phonics skills. Adults do not model saying sounds and applying them into writing and spelling, so pupils are unsure of the task and lose concentration, and then their behaviour slips.
- Writing outcomes are lower than those in reading and mathematics and lower than those seen nationally at the end of early years and key stage 1. Pupils' current work and the school's priorities for improvement show that this is still a focus area for improvement. The lead teacher for English has identified strengths and weaknesses in writing across the school. She has directed teachers' attention to supporting pupils in editing and improving their work. Some of the successes of this direction can be seen in key stage 2 pupils' work, which demonstrates that pupils are becoming more confident about improving their own work and that of their peers. However, this direction and expectation are not consistent. Misconceptions and mistakes, such as those in spelling and punctuation, are often not identified and addressed. Pupils in all year groups are not clear about what is expected of them in the content or the presentation of their work. Work is often not well presented, and handwriting and inaccurate letter formation are not addressed.
- You have identified that the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 children need clearer direction in their learning. I agree that this needs to be a priority for improvement. The starting points of children's learning across the curriculum are not clear, so work is often not well matched to their individual needs. For example, some pupils with skills that are higher than typical for their age in aspects of learning are not challenged to test out and deepen their understanding. Although regular observations take place, we agreed that these could be used more effectively to identify the next steps a child needs to take. Expectations of what children can achieve and how they behave are not always high enough.
- The majority of parents said that their children are happy and safe at school. They are mindful of the many changes that have taken place, particularly for some classes, but most have confidence that you will address their concerns and bring about improvement.
- Pupils enjoy opportunities to work and play with other pupils of different ages. They particularly value assemblies and collective worship, as they said that this is when they all join together, it is a 'fun time' and they celebrate successes, such as respectful behaviour and good work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the quality of teaching, provision and behaviour management for the younger pupils
- teaching in phonics is improved, so that it is systematic, with sounds and spellings well modelled by adults, enabling pupils to make more rapid progress in reading and writing
- expectations across school are raised of the quality and presentation of the work that pupils of all abilities produce
- teachers are supported in making accurate assessments of pupils' learning, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics
- effective systems are in place to regularly check the attainment and progress of all pupils and groups of pupils in all year groups from their starting points. They should then ensure that this information is shared with governors, so that governors can direct their questions more accurately to check the effectiveness of leaders' actions for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of York, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I looked at specific aspects of the school's work, including leadership, the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, and safeguarding arrangements.

You and I worked closely together throughout the inspection, observing teaching and learning, looking at pupils' work and discussing the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. We discussed recent changes in staffing and the school's self-evaluation. I reviewed school documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. I had discussions with the school business manager and the lead teachers for English and mathematics. I looked at pupils' work in English with the lead teacher. I met with representatives from the governing body, including the co-chairs, and with the local authority school improvement partner. I heard pupils read and spoke to a group of pupils about the school. I considered the views of parents, speaking to them before school and noting the 15 responses to Ofsted's

questionnaire, Parent View. Staff views in the Ofsted online questionnaire were also considered.