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Mr Paul Stanley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stanley

Short inspection of Taverham VC CE Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You and your deputy headteacher form a strong partnership and give the school clear direction to ensure that it continues to improve rapidly. You have built a strong team of senior and middle leaders who put the needs of children at the centre of all they do. The pastoral support the school provides is highly effective. Pupils enjoy coming to school; this is reflected in good attendance, with few pupils missing large amounts of school.

Since the previous inspection, you and other school leaders have strengthened your approach to monitoring so that this is rigorous and shows teachers what they do well and where they need to improve. You and other senior leaders do not shy away from holding difficult conversations with staff where you identify underperformance. This has resulted in teaching, learning and assessment improving.

You, your leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve. The school development plan sets out the key priorities for improvement effectively. You monitor the impact of your actions regularly and make adjustments where necessary. The school's systems for tracking the progress of pupils work well, meaning that you know how pupils are doing.

Leaders are quick to intervene if a pupil is at risk of falling behind.

Pupils' excellent behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils are keen to learn and willing to support one another. They move around the school very sensibly and are polite to staff and visitors. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility and take their leadership roles seriously. For example, the school council meets all candidates for staff appointments. The eco-council undertakes surveys of school waste. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is strong. They embrace the school's values and help it achieve its aim of being 'a Christian school for all'.

The curriculum is well planned to meet pupils' needs, especially in developing core skills. You and your leaders keep it under review and make changes to enhance its effectiveness. You have rightly identified that progress is not so strong in subjects other than English and mathematics. The most able in particular are not challenged enough in the wider curriculum. Strong enrichment encompasses sport, music and the arts, including residential visits.

The governing body brings a wide range of skills to the school and has a good mixture of relatively new appointments and experienced governors. Governors know the school well and offer challenge and support to school leaders. They visit regularly to check on progress against the school's key priorities for improvement. They have helped the school secure a much-needed extension to the building.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has developed a strong safeguarding culture where the needs of the whole child are paramount. Staff have been well trained and follow the correct procedures if they have any concerns. Documents are detailed and show actions have been taken. You and your leaders have established close professional working relationships with a range of other agencies. You will challenge external decisions which you consider are not in the best interests of children. The school supports children looked after effectively and carefully tracks their progress to ensure they make the progress they should. The single central record of employment checks meets requirements and is up to date.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. They say that any rare incidents of bullying are dealt with to their satisfaction. They say that pupils get on well with one another and are happy to help. The vast majority of parents who expressed a view believe that their children are well cared for. A typical comment stated: 'My children have benefited from being taught by kind, caring, dedicated and talented teaching staff, in a happy, safe environment.'

Inspection findings

- In order to determine whether the school remains good, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry that we agreed at our initial meeting. First of all, we considered how leaders have improved the progress and attainment of most-able pupils. Their progress was an area to improve at the last inspection. In 2017,

pupils with high prior attainment did not do so well in reading in particular.

- New approaches to the teaching of reading have benefited the most able. They are developing their skills in inference and deduction to make links in their learning and deepen their understanding. The impact is that the proportions of pupils exceeding age-related expectations have increased this year in reading.
- In some classes, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in subjects other than English and mathematics. This means they do not make the progress they should. Narrow approaches to learning sometimes constrain how these pupils are able to express their ideas or prevent them from deepening their understanding.
- Next, we considered what you are doing to ensure that the differences between disadvantaged pupils and the others are diminishing over time. This was because the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been significantly below average at the end of Year 6 in reading and mathematics over two years. In the 2017 national tests, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was below that of other pupils.
- The appointment of a 'pupil premium champion' has raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils across the school. The champion ensures that disadvantaged pupils take a full part in school life and are represented in activities such as the school council, sports council and a range of extra-curricular clubs.
- Leaders have ensured that every pupil supported by the pupil premium has an individual learning plan and they are each reviewed at pupil-progress meetings. The pupil premium is carefully spent on overcoming barriers to learning and ensuring that disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need. As a consequence, in every year group, differences in attainment are diminishing between disadvantaged pupils and the others. Nonetheless, there remain some areas where differences persist, such as reading in Year 5 and writing in Year 4.
- Finally, we considered what leaders are doing to improve pupils' progress and attainment in reading and mathematics. For two years, the progress of Year 6 pupils over time was below average in reading and mathematics. Attainment was in line with the national average at the expected standard in reading and mathematics, and indeed above average at the higher standard in mathematics. Nonetheless, this was not as strong as attainment in writing and English, grammar and punctuation, which was above average at both the expected standard and greater depth/the higher standard.
- The focus on teaching specific skills to pupils in reading has benefited all groups, not just the most able. Leaders have ensured that pupils have access to high-quality texts that stretch their vocabulary. The school's library is centrally located and well resourced. It is widely used by pupils and has a librarian who is on hand to support and guide.
- A new approach to teaching mathematics, with a focus on problem-solving and reasoning, challenges all pupils. Conjecture is used to encourage pupils to prove their findings and think around a problem. For example, Year 6 pupils were asked to consider 'Goldbach's conjecture', a problem relating to prime numbers that is taxing modern mathematicians. The school's investment in practical resources

has supported its move towards a 'concrete, pictorial, abstract' approach to teaching mathematics. Pupils are being asked to find the most efficient methods of calculation, and to use a range of equipment to help them.

- The school's own performance information shows that progress is stronger in all year groups in reading and mathematics than it used to be, following these changes. Teachers have built upon improvements in attainment in 2017 to ensure that it is rising in the current year too.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on work to diminish differences between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the few areas that remain
- most-able pupils are sufficiently challenged in subjects other than English and mathematics, so that they can deepen their understanding and present their work more freely.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders, four governors, including the chair, and pupils. I met with a representative of the Viscount Nelson Education Trust, which supports the school. Together with you, or your deputy, we visited classes in all year groups. I examined a range of school documents, policies and assessment information. I considered 114 responses from parents to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, and 102 free-text messages. I also spoke to parents in the playground before school. I considered the responses to Ofsted surveys from 123 pupils and 32 staff.