

17 July 2018

Mrs Dawn Groves
Headteacher
Holy Trinity Church of England First School
Bell Tower Place
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 1NB

Dear Mrs Groves

Short inspection of Holy Trinity Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 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. All staff are ambitious for the school and share your vision that teaching excites and challenges pupils in all areas of the curriculum. Adults in school are committed to ensuring that pupils receive an all-round education that prepares them to become active citizens with high aspirations of themselves. The vast majority of parents and carers who made their views known are delighted with the provision on offer. They comment on your strong leadership and enthusiasm for learning. They say that Holy Trinity is a special place where all staff are dedicated to the pupils in school and 'go the extra mile' to ensure that children flourish. Staff, parents and pupils are proud to be part of the school and all work together harmoniously to ensure that the school's ethos and community spirit are fulfilled. Very specific praise and comments from staff, pupils and parents received during the inspection focused on your skills and dedication.

Published results show that pupils' attainment overall is continually above national averages in reading, writing, phonics and mathematics. This represents good progress from children's starting points, which are broadly typical on entry to the nursery. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is also improving. This year, a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils are working at age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points because of the effective support provided by caring staff who know them well.

You have clear and appropriate plans in place to ensure that pupils continue to make good progress. You have successfully addressed the main challenges from the previous inspection report.

Previously, inspectors highlighted writing as a focus for improvement because pupils' progress was not quite as swift in writing as in other subjects. You and your team rose to the challenge. You provided effective leadership and good-quality training to develop teachers' subject knowledge. Across the school, teachers use exciting activities to inspire pupils' writing. They plan focused support for any pupil who does not meet the high expectations set. Pupils enjoy writing for a range of purposes across the curriculum, especially during history and science topics. Pupils' outcomes have improved. The proportion of pupils in key stage 1 who achieved the expected standards in writing last year was well above the national average. Currently, a larger proportion of pupils are working at a greater depth of understanding. Girls, in particular, excel at their writing tasks. You have correctly identified, however, that boys' attainment in writing is not as exceptional when compared to girls in school. Consequently, you have planned some priorities for the improvement of boys' writing and have appointed a 'boys' ambassador' within the staff to champion the focus on improving boys' attainment in this and other subject areas.

At the time of your previous inspection, the specific roles and responsibilities of middle leaders were unclear. Some leaders did not have sufficient time to complete their work across the wider school. The previous inspection report tasked middle leaders to take the initiative and use their expertise fully to accelerate school improvement. You now ensure that all subject leaders have dedicated time out of their own classrooms to undertake wider leadership duties. Middle leaders understand your expectations and are well trained to provide subject-specific support for colleagues. Subject leaders work closely and effectively with you to check on the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom. They have allotted times to visit other classrooms to observe teaching and learning. Leaders gather pupils' views about lessons to inform decision-making. They check pupils' books to ensure that pupils make good progress. Following monitoring activities, subject leaders give advice and feedback to other staff, suggesting new ideas that foster continuous improvement.

Improvements in the quality of subject leadership have helped to increase pupils' attainment across the wider curriculum last year. Not all middle leaders, however, currently use data about pupils' progress as well as they might. Some do not analyse assessment information thoroughly enough and so miss opportunities to swiftly identify and address differences in outcomes between pupil groups. For example, those between boys and girls in school. This aspect of leaders' practice needs further development to ensure consistency.

Strong governance underpins the school's work. Governors know the school well and use a diverse range of skills to provide challenge and support for leaders. They monitor the school's work effectively and this has ensured year-on-year improvements in pupils' outcomes. Governors challenge and support subject leaders

directly, for example holding them accountable for raising standards in each key stage. Governors have challenged middle leaders to make sure that their subject reports fully explain the improvements that have made in each subject and capture precisely just how effective leaders' actions and work have been.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety of pupils is of paramount importance to you and your team. You place pupils' welfare, protection, success and enjoyment at the core of your decisions. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training which keeps them up to date with the most recent safeguarding guidance. They report any concerns promptly, keep detailed records and work tenaciously with leaders to make sure that families receive appropriate support. Governors make checks frequently to assure themselves that the school's procedures are thorough. For example, they review recruitment procedures methodically, including checks that leaders make on the suitability of adults to work with children. Pupils' excellent attendance continues. You work closely with families to increase the attendance of any pupils who are too often absent.

Pupils feel very safe in school. They report that bullying is rare and that adults deal swiftly with their concerns. The wide curriculum you offer supports pupils to think about their own safety, teaching them how to take responsibility for their own well-being. For example, in Reception, children understand the importance of wearing their safety goggles for woodwork. Meanwhile, older pupils know how to stay safe online by keeping their personal information confidential and being cautious when using the internet. Leaders gather pupils' views regularly and act on the feedback provided, giving pupils an excellent example of how democracy works in action.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I considered how well the boys in school achieve in reading, writing and mathematics compared to the girls. Last year, the published data for Year 2 pupils showed that boys in school make progress that is at or above the level of other boys nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. However, compared to the excellent progress and attainment of the girls within school, the standards achieved by boys were much lower. This year, you and other leaders in school recognised similar differences between boys' and girls' achievements and made plans to address the variances. So far, you have introduced new procedures for teaching and learning in the core subjects to help boys begin to catch up. The improvements you have made are beginning to lead to better outcomes for current boys, though differences, particularly in writing, still exist.
- In mathematics, you provide additional support to groups of girls and boys in each class if their progress falls short of what is expected. Highly skilled support staff offer focused catch-up sessions for pupils in mathematics. They also help groups of pupils during mathematics lessons alongside teachers. This system ensures that the gains made during catch-up sessions continue within everyday

lessons in mathematics. Consequently, progress is now more rapid. For the current Year 4 pupils, there are more boys working at greater depth and achieving higher standards in mathematics than in previous years, and boys' attainment in mathematics is catching up to that of the girls.

- Since the previous inspection, pupils' results in the phonics screening check have continued to rise, and last year your school ranked within the top 10% of all schools nationally in this subject. Current Year 1 pupils continue this trend with similar high standards of achievement.
- I visited the early years classrooms to find out whether pupils still got off to the flying start mentioned at the time of the previous inspection. Nursery and Reception children concentrated carefully on their many different tasks, both outside and indoors. They worked safely at their technology table, inventing, designing and making new toys from wood. In the playground, a group of the most able pupils drew and measured huge sunflowers while staff taught them how to use apparatus with precision. Boys and girls accessed all areas of their classroom freely and all groups make good or better progress. Leadership is strong in early years. The leader uses assessment information about the children's progress effectively to identify where further improvements are needed.
- You, your team and governors keep a close eye on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. You spend the additional pupil premium funding astutely to support each pupil's individual needs. For example, the programme of support offered in mathematics for disadvantaged pupils has helped them to increase their standardised scores by an average of 20 months in just four months of work. You provide funding to help talented disadvantaged pupils with extra music activities to hone their skills and harness their gifts. This individualised focus takes every child into account and offers support for pupils with different abilities. Your staff ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported well with their writing skills, too. Currently, very few disadvantaged pupils are below age-related expectations in writing because staff step in to support their skills at every opportunity and provide inspiring writing tasks across the curriculum. More disadvantaged pupils exceed expectations in reading compared to other core subjects. Your team ensure that reading has a high profile across all subjects and parent helpers provide excellent support in this subject.
- Governors check that funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is making a positive effect on their learning. This group of pupils make good progress because staff provide personalised support wherever it is needed. Teachers and their assistants understand each pupil's needs well and remove, or work around, any barriers that may prevent learning.
- I reviewed the depth and breadth of your curriculum to check that it was still as strong as at the time of your previous inspection. Staff provide a variety of opportunities within science and technology so that pupils excel in these areas. Pupils were very keen to explain how to extract DNA from plants. Pupils said that they love to learn and teachers make their activities exciting so they always try their best. Your arts curriculum is a flagship of your school, woven seamlessly into all other subjects. In particular, it supports pupils to gain a deep and

meaningful understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff, parents and children alike cherish this aspect of your curriculum. You take every opening to celebrate, display and promote your pupils' work. Recently, you opened your own exhibition on site with your shepherd's hut gallery. Pupils are particularly proud to show their work at this special venue. You have strong links with your local community and invite many visitors in to school to widen pupils' aspirations for the future, including scientists, storytellers and members of the rescue services. This increases pupils' knowledge of careers beyond school.

- Within the broader curriculum, your school ensures that pupils' health, fitness and safety develop very well. Recently, your new outdoor track has encouraged pupils and parents to stay healthy, accessing the track before, during and after school to walk a mile a day. Many parents and pupils agreed that this was very good use of your physical education and sports funding. Pupils enjoy many varied sporting activities. Governors are keen to find a sport for each child to enjoy and so you offer a broader assortment of sports than seen in many primary schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all subject leaders thoroughly analyse the progress made by different groups of pupils and use assessment information to focus their activities on diminishing differences in outcomes
- staff are supported to raise boys' achievement, especially in writing, so that they catch up to the very high standards achieved by other groups of pupils in school.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Humble
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the newly appointed chair of the governing body and two other governors. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you and your deputy. I spoke to a diocese representative over the telephone to find out more about the school. I spoke informally to groups of pupils during breaktime and in lessons. In addition to this, I met more formally with a group of older pupils to gather their views on the school.

I scrutinised the work in a sample of pupils' books and reviewed examples of monitoring reports produced by your subject leaders. I evaluated information relating to pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I examined the information and policies available on the school's website and reviewed your safeguarding documentation, including records that link to the behaviour, well-being and safety of pupils. I considered the 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with parents at the beginning of the day. I also considered the views of 15 members of staff who completed Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.