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Mrs S Hughes
Headteacher
St Herbert's CofE (VA) Primary and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Short inspection of St Herbert's CofE (VA) Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 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. You have created a welcoming atmosphere. A positive sense of mutual respect between staff, parents and pupils is evident throughout the school. This promotes the Christian values that are lived out day by day. You have an accurate, reflective and honest view of the school's strengths and priorities. You work effectively with senior leaders to draw up plans for school improvement. These documents contain many well-focused actions and effective ways of checking the impact on pupils' achievement.

Governors provide effective strategic leadership to the school. They know the school well because they draw their evidence from a wide range of sources, including from their visits to the school. Governors share the same high aspirations for the school as senior leaders, and they offer the right balance of support and challenge to help the school to improve.

Parents and carers appreciate the well-designed and effective curriculum created by leaders. They commented on the positive use of outdoor areas, which ensures that pupils have additional access to many subjects, including art, music and sports. One comment summed up the many positive responses received during the inspection:

'This is a wonderful school where the children are at the heart of everything. From the office to the teaching staff it feels like everyone is working together to create an amazing learning environment.'

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the level of challenge in pupils' learning. Across the school, improved assessment leads to pupils having opportunities to

develop their learning. For example, in Year 6 mathematics, pupils think deeply and practise their reasoning skills. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations. As a result, pupils are making increasingly stronger progress from their starting points. Current pupils' progress information shows that the proportion attaining the higher standards across the school is rising. You were also asked to improve aspects of teaching, including questioning skills. Staff use questioning to develop and extend pupils' learning. Teachers use opportunities during discussions to develop answers in greater depth, giving pupils opportunities to explain what they think. This means that staff also identify and address pupils' misconceptions. As a result, effective teaching across many subjects leads to good progress.

You were also asked to improve outcomes in grammar and punctuation. There has been an effective focus on the development of vocabulary and grammar throughout the school. Teachers give pupils opportunities to apply their skills in a wide range of writing. As a result, spelling, punctuation and grammar have improved. Your success is evident in your significantly stronger provisional outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2018.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. While new initiatives are bringing about improvements, a number of children in early years are not yet fully prepared for Year 1. Some pupils in key stage 1 are also not ready for key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, underpinned by regular training and updates in all aspects of child protection. The school building is secure, and signing in procedures are thorough. You and your staff are vigilant about safeguarding matters. You make sure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a high profile. You are prompt in making referrals to the local authority. Senior leaders keep detailed records of concerns about pupils' welfare and are quick to take the right actions to ensure pupils' well-being.

Pupils feel well cared for and behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. They told me that they receive regular teaching about keeping themselves safe. They value this guidance which helps them keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when online. Parents told me they are well informed about safeguarding procedures through newsletters sent by school leaders.

Inspection findings

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes across the early years. Within the Nursery and Reception classes, a wide variety of activities provide children with the opportunity to develop their skills independently. They demonstrate high levels of cooperation. Staff support children's thinking with good questioning and a wide range of language. Children gain confidence from their positive relationships with staff and collaborative play with others. Effective tracking systems are used to inform teaching and match work to children's abilities. Evidence from children's work and from your own

assessment information shows that current children in the early years make good progress, with boys in particular showing notable improvement in their achievement in writing. Although the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception is improving, it remains below that expected for children their age. The changes in place are not fully embedded, and a small number of children are not ready for Year 1.

- We also discussed the progress you have made in improving the outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Staff now teach phonics in a more systematic and focused way. Phonics lessons observed during the inspection show that staff reinforce letter-sounds pupils have been taught. Staff evaluate pupils' learning carefully and systematically at each step. When pupils begin to write independently, staff talk about what they are going to write and teach them to say a sentence to help them remember it before they write it. Pupils are now taught at a level that is specifically designed to meet their needs and fill any gaps in their learning. Consequently, achievement has increased each year, and, by the end of Year 1, most pupils meet the standard in the phonics screening check.
- The next area we looked at was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes across key stage 1. Teachers ensure that pupils in key stage 1 develop an understanding of basic mathematical knowledge and skills, such as place value, counting, and addition and subtraction. Teachers also give pupils the chance to use their writing skills across many subjects, such as in science, where pupils wrote about the habitats of penguins. Consequently, pupils are developing greater writing stamina and are enthusiastic about their writing. Leaders' focus on engaging, high-quality texts is having a positive effect on the reading progress of current key stage 1 pupils. Teaching focuses on the best way to meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make good progress in key stage 1 in a wide range of subjects. However, these improvements have been introduced recently, and further time is required to build on these improvements to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils are ready for key stage 2.
- The next area we looked at was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is small and varies from year to year. This makes the use of data about their progress unreliable. Leaders make effective use of additional funding to support these pupils. You and your leadership team continually monitor the progress and achievements of disadvantaged pupils. You ensure that they receive tailored teaching and support to help them learn and improve their progress. A good range of social and emotional, as well as academic, support is in place. You review this support frequently, adapting it if needed. As a result of these actions, current progress data across the curriculum shows that the progress these pupils are making is improving, especially in key stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to embed recent improvements in teaching and learning, so that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education
- they embed the improvements made to the quality of provision in the early years so that a higher proportion of pupils are ready for Year 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you and I also spoke with staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. I looked at learning in pupils' books.

I reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and the school development plan. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 70 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. I also considered 31 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 75 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.

I visited classes, together with you, to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.