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Carolyn Fairbrother
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Dear Mrs Fairbrother

Short inspection of Little Houghton Church of England Primary

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the senior leaders have shaped a school in which pupils are happy and keen to learn. There is a strong culture of mutual respect and support, as well as high expectations. Staff and pupils embody the school's values in their work and in their relationships with each other. You, the senior staff and the committed governing body have a clear vision for what you are trying to achieve for both pupils and the local community.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they learn in a calm, orderly environment. They are polite, friendly and articulate. During our visits to classrooms, the atmosphere was purposeful, with pupils working well together. Pupils told me how much they enjoy school. The school's strong focus on supporting pupils' social development is reflected well in the high levels of cooperation seen at playtime. Pupils take responsibility by being play leaders and organising lunchtime activities. Responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for parents and staff are positive.

The majority of parents and carers who completed the online survey would recommend the school and appreciate the teaching and support their children receive. One parent said: 'I have always felt that my child has been very well supported at Little Houghton School.' However, a small number of parents expressed concerns about leaders' communication and said that some matters have previously been unresolved.

Your detailed self-evaluation and school improvement plans clearly identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Priorities are being tackled with rigour and governors monitor progress towards achieving the school's targets well, so that the school continues to improve. Occasionally, middle-ability pupils have not made as much progress as their peers, and pupils' needs have not been identified soon enough. Leaders and governors have not kept a close enough eye on the progress of these pupils in the past.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teachers set work that is at the right level of challenge for all groups, including the most and least able. You have taken effective action to address this. Progress rates for all pupils improved considerably in 2016. However, in 2017, middle-ability pupils did not achieve as well as other groups of pupils in key stage 2, particularly in writing. Leaders have responded appropriately and have taken action to improve writing. For example, staff have moderated pupils' work with colleagues from neighbouring schools.

You were also asked to ensure that, when leaders are monitoring pupils' work, they focus on the impact teaching has on pupils' learning. Scrutiny of the school's monitoring and evaluation information shows that this is now established practice at the school.

Governors share your understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They challenge leaders about the progress that pupils make but do not have detailed information about the progress of specific groups of pupils, particularly middle-ability pupils, so that they can hold leaders to account more effectively.

The majority of parents state that leaders communicate with them well and that the school provides good support for their children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A minority of parents did not share these views. The school's communication with parents has not always been effective. For example, some of the information on the website is not clear or easy to find.

Staff take appropriate action in response to the rare incidents of poor behaviour and bullying. Leaders have worked with pupils to develop a robust response to bullying and ensure that pupils fully understand what bullying is. Not all parents are aware of this work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. You have established good systems for securing the safety of pupils. Records are detailed and of good quality and you work well with outside agencies.

You have ensured that staff are regularly trained and understand their responsibilities in this area. Records, including the single central record of checks on adults' suitability to work and volunteer at the school, are diligently maintained and stored securely. Governors regularly check that the school's safeguarding processes remain robust.

The vast majority of parents are confident that their children are kept safe. Pupils know whom to turn to if they have a worry. They are confident that concerns would be dealt with quickly. As one said: 'If I ever have any problems, the teachers always sort them out.'

Inspection findings

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in key stage 1 was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards have improved since 2016, and many more pupils are reaching the expected standard and greater depth.
- At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, progress declined in reading, writing and mathematics, from previously high figures in 2016. As a result of the school's work to raise standards, pupils are improving their skills in editing their writing and in understanding the books that they read. The school's leaders are developing a more consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics which focuses on deep conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. The school's assessment information and evidence from lessons and pupils' books indicate encouraging signs of improvement. On the whole, pupils are now making secure progress in key stage 2. However, middle-ability pupils do not make as much progress as their peers.
- Leaders have developed effective systems for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. This includes regular checks on the quality of pupils' work and the involvement of governors in holding leaders to account. The regular meetings between teachers and leaders to review pupils' progress enable staff to analyse information about pupils' achievement more carefully and take action more swiftly when pupils fall behind.
- Reports from senior leaders, governors and the local authority cover a broad range of the school's work, including assessment information, behaviour, curriculum coverage, support for new staff and the views of pupils. However, governors do not have enough information about the progress that middle-ability pupils make, and as a consequence cannot hold leaders to account effectively to ensure that this improves.
- Pupils speak very positively about the school and feel valued by staff and each other. They enjoy the work they are given and feel both challenged and supported by the staff. Teachers plan interesting and enjoyable activities that motivate pupils to work hard. For example, in Years 3 and 4, pupils enjoyed looking at the work of the Victorian artist William Morris. Pupils were able to explain how symmetry was used in some of his work, and create their own versions using symmetrical shapes. In Years 5 and 6, pupils had opportunities to develop their skills using different historical sources, during a 'Viking' day where a visiting historian helped them to understand more about life as a Viking.
- Middle leaders understand their roles and have accessed professional training to hone their leadership skills. They have formulated accurate action plans and are monitoring the quality of teaching in their areas. However, they do not focus closely enough on the progress of groups, and in particular middle-ability pupils.
- Pupils get off to a strong start in the Reception Year. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development by the end of the

Reception Year has been well above the national average. Similarly, the proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check remains well above national levels. Leaders have introduced a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics, and we observed that teaching is very effective in introducing sounds and then showing pupils how to apply the sounds in their spellings.

- Communication and the partnership with parents are not consistently effective. A minority of parents feel that they could be better informed about the work of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels, including middle leaders and governors, have sufficient information about pupils' achievements to check the progress of all groups of pupils, and particularly those of middle ability
- the school improves the way it communicates with parents and carers, so that they are fully informed about all aspects of the school's work.

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

Yours sincerely

Damien Turrell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, pupils and members of the governing body and spoke to a representative from the local authority. Together we visited all year groups. I also reviewed a range of pupils' work. Parents' views were taken into account through 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, including seven free-text comments. I also spoke with a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes, in class and around the school. I reviewed a wide range of the school's documents, including information about pupils' achievement and attendance, the school development plan, and policies and procedures. I also checked documentation for safeguarding and logs of pupils' behaviour, including bullying records. We also discussed the school's self-evaluation.