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Mr Bradley Young
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Dear Mr Young

Short inspection of Homefield VC CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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. Parents, carers and pupils appreciate the warm and nurturing ethos that staff and leaders are proud of. Parents said it is a 'supportive' and 'very friendly, caring school'. The school's ethos is celebrated and embedded and it guides the work of staff in promoting pupils' development. One parent said, 'The teaching staff often go above and beyond to support the children.' Leaders have the support of staff, governors and the wider school community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about every aspect of the school and all would recommend the school to others, as exemplified by one parent's statement that, 'This is a first-rate school with a first-rate team and leader.'

Pupils behave very well. They are polite and friendly to visitors. They listen to their teachers and to each other. They talk confidently about the subjects and activities they enjoy most. The pupils I spoke with were very positive about their school. They value the wide range of opportunities they are given in school to take responsibility, such as being members of the junior leadership team and worship committee, or being a caring crusader or an eco-warrior.

Leaders have made good progress in addressing areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils are now provided with more opportunities to write for different purposes and in different styles to improve the content of their writing. The most able pupils are being challenged more in lessons. Pupils told me that they like how the teachers 'push you to be the best you can be'. One pupil said,

'Teachers challenge you not to be in your comfort zone, but not in a panic zone either.'

Accurate self-evaluation identifies the school's strengths and points out where improvements are needed. For example, pupils' attainment in writing at greater depth is not as strong as in other subjects across the school, and this is a current priority. Raising standards in mathematics is also a key priority identified by leaders.

The school's comprehensive improvement plan details the next steps and the targets that leaders are working towards. It enhances the school's capacity for further improvement. The leadership team is focused and determined to continually improve the school. For example, where teaching has not been effective in the past, leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the quality has improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that policies are up to date and meet the latest guidance. All staff are provided with safeguarding training and this is updated annually. Staff are kept informed of any changes as they occur. All appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out on staff and volunteers. Staff know their pupils well. Any concerns are reported, considered carefully and prompt action is taken. Case files are detailed and well organised.

Pupils spoke confidently about the ways in which school leaders and staff work hard to keep them safe and look after them. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and staff agree. Pupils know who to go to if they have concerns and feel supported in resolving them.

Pupils know how to keep safe on the internet and the reasons for doing so. They understand what bullying is and explained to me that, while it may happen, it is rare and is resolved quickly and effectively by staff. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe outside school.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, my first key line of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in writing at key stages 1 and 2. In 2017 and 2018, pupils' outcomes in writing at both key stages were in line with the national average. The outcomes for the most able pupils in writing were below the national average in 2018. I was interested to find out what the reason for this was, particularly as significant improvements in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills were evident in the 2018 key stage 2 national tests.
- Leaders have already taken swift action to improve the teaching, learning and assessment of writing. Their review of the impact of the school's work to improve writing resulted in the redesign of the English curriculum. Most teachers now check that pupils understand the key features of writing styles and pupils have the opportunity to embed those features and practise writing at length. This works well. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote a non-chronological report about plastics and their effect on the environment. Their writing was of a high standard

as a result of the precise guidance their teacher gave them to improve their work.

- Evidence in pupils' books shows that pupils typically make good progress in developing their writing skills. However, the guidance given to pupils to enable them to improve their writing to the higher standard does not consistently build on what pupils can already do and know. In some classes there is also some inconsistency in the quality of pupils' writing in topic work compared to their work in English lessons.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out how leaders are improving pupils' achievement in mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. This was because results at the end of key stage 1 had dipped at the end of 2018 but had significantly improved at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils' mathematical reasoning and fluency are now improving because teachers provide opportunities for them to develop their skills. Through the school's chosen approach, teachers model the knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn. Pupils then practise these skills in a series of structured activities. Pupils also have opportunities to build their confidence by working together and articulating their knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils select challenges. Teachers check their choices so that the activities pupils undertake are suitably difficult to move them on from their current level of understanding. Pupils told me that the activities they are given 'make you think' and that they know making mistakes is often good for learning. However, some inconsistency remains in teachers' use of strategies to deepen pupils' mathematical thinking. Problem-solving in mathematics remains an area for development to enable pupils to develop reasoning skills and fluency further.
- My next line of enquiry was to investigate how well reading is taught across the school and particularly in key stage 1. This was because, in 2018, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard and reaching greater depth in key stage 1 decreased from previous years. It fell to below the national average.
- Phonics teaching is effective. Pupils make good progress in phonics through the early years and to the Year 1 phonics screening check. Leaders' analysis of the weaker outcomes at the end of Year 2 in reading showed that they needed to improve the way in which pupils comprehend the texts they read. Consequently, leaders amended the way reading is taught to ensure that pupils develop better skills of comprehension, including making educated guesses and learning to explain what they read. This has been effective and pupils now have a better understanding of what they read.
- Pupils develop the skills of reading in many areas of the curriculum. Through the study of characters in texts and the function of purpose, audience and text type, pupils develop an understanding of the meaning conveyed in texts. Additional support is available for children who need more help with reading. As a result, in 2018, the proportion of pupils in key stage 2 attaining the expected standard was significantly above the national average and the proportion attaining greater depth has increased sharply.
- While pupils typically learn to read well, the importance of reading for pleasure

does not have as high a profile in English as the development of other skills. Some pupils still do not enjoy reading and do not read for pleasure.

- I also sought to establish the breadth and richness of your curriculum. This is because leaders have recently revised its content and organisation. Subjects are now blocked over a period of time to enable children to be immersed in the subject being studied to deepen their understanding. Pupils enjoy a wide variety of enrichment days, clubs and trips, and have opportunities to develop their sporting skills through a range of sports and competitions. The pupils I spoke with were very appreciative of the curriculum. There is good coverage of a wide range of subjects beyond English and mathematics that interests and excites pupils. One parent commented, 'My children come home excited about education.'
- Finally, I looked at how the funding received from the physical education (PE) and sport premium is used. The initial plan published on the school website referred to additional curriculum swimming lessons being funded by the grant. This would have been inappropriate. The school's plan and strategy document were changed just prior to my visit and the revised document is now on the website. My meeting with governors confirmed that they know the school well and understand their legal responsibilities. They ensure that the PE and sport premium is used appropriately and well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff use the new approach to teaching writing consistently well and provide precise support and guidance to enable pupils to achieve the higher standard in writing.
- teachers across the school develop pupils' mathematical reasoning and fluency consistently well
- effective strategies are developed to inspire pupils to read for pleasure more frequently.

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

Yours sincerely

Ashley Best-White
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and other senior leaders as well as a group of three governors. I spoke with a representative from the local authority over the telephone. As well as visiting lessons, I spoke with groups of pupils and individual pupils around the school. I looked at pupils' books across a range of ages, abilities and subjects, as well as information from the school's assessment system.

I scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, current progress information and pupils' attendance information. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school. I evaluated safeguarding referrals and child protection records, including the single central record. I also looked at the school's website.

I took account of the 49 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the 26 free-text responses, and considered the 56 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.