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Mrs Marie-Claire Parsons
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Dear Mrs Parsons

Short inspection of Sherington Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 21 May 2019, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your arrival, when the school became part of the Village Schools Federation in January 2018, you have set about school improvement with determination and focus. You promptly reviewed key school policies and procedures and quickly established a clear pathway for developing the school, building on previous success and reinvigorating the school further. You have identified precisely the school's main strengths and those areas that require some improvement.

Staff, parents and carers, pupils and governors are all highly appreciative of your inclusive approach and rightly hold you in high regard. You have instilled a clarity of purpose within the whole team, which is confident in the direction you have set and embraces the new challenges. Staff are overwhelmingly positive. They feel confident in your leadership and know that you are readily available – always willing to make time to talk on the telephone on the days you are not physically present. Staff value highly the increase in professional networks provided by the federation. They describe how well supported they are by, for instance, sharing moderation and expertise with other colleagues.

Governance is strong. Since joining the federation, governors' skills have been honed and processes streamlined so that governors are highly effective. They provide appropriate support and challenge for leaders and check regularly to see for themselves how the school is operating. Governors have a strong and ambitious

vision for the school.

This is a happy, purposeful school where pupils, parents and staff have a true sense of belonging. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They told me that they, 'laugh a lot and make friends'. They relish each other's company and form strong bonds. They talk animatedly about the games that they play. Pupils are well skilled in getting along together. They told me that when, from time to time, there are minor conflicts, 'We sort things out together, we figure things out'. Pupils trust in teachers to help them resolve more tricky issues and to guide them appropriately in their learning.

Parents value the community feel of the school. One parent writing on Parent View typified the views of many in saying, 'Great dedicated staff have built a welcome, caring and stimulating environment'. The school is valued as a vibrant part of the community at the centre of events such as maypole dancing and the Easter-bonnet parade. Parents recognised the way the changes implemented as part of joining the federation have further improved the school.

You have maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection. Pupils behave impeccably around the school. During lessons, they are keen to participate, and listen carefully to each other. Across the school, pupils look after each other well, making sure that they are all included in learning and play. There is an air of comradeship. Pupils are genuinely supportive of each other. They celebrate each other's talents and achievements whether on the sports field or in story-writing for competitions. In this way, they practise the school's values well.

You have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils generally form their handwriting carefully and take pride in their work. Nevertheless, you have rightly identified that standards are not equally high across the curriculum. You are wisely revising the curriculum so that it provides all pupils, but particularly the most able, with more opportunity to connect and deepen their thinking across subjects. You know that sometimes the most able pupils do not currently receive enough challenge to make consistently good progress from their starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All necessary checks are carried out before staff are appointed. All required safeguarding training is up to date and complete. Processes have been reviewed by governors, who work effectively with leaders to ensure that everything is as it should be.

Pupils' well-being is a central part of the culture of the school. This helps to keep pupils safe. Staff know pupils well and keep a watchful eye, which helps ensure that any worries are identified and acted on quickly. Adaptions to the building, such as fencing the playground, have further improved pupils' safety. Pupils have an appropriate and developing understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely together at the provision for the most able pupils. Current most-able pupils do not make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points, although this has improved recently. Teaching does not always stretch their thinking, for example, tasks are not always sufficiently challenging.
- The books of higher ability pupils show that they enjoy opportunities to write for a range of purposes. Pupils told me that they enjoy story-writing. Outcomes in books show a recent development of sentence structure, punctuation skills and a growing sense of how their writing appears to the reader. In mathematics, pupils benefit from the development of a range of computational skills along with regular practical tasks and some problem solving. There are some indicators that suggest that pupils would sometimes benefit from a further raised level of challenge.
- We looked at the progress of children in Reception Year. The early years environment is engaging and well structured to support children in investigating and learning. Alongside exciting opportunities, for example 'digging for dinosaurs' and 'making potions', every opportunity to practise reading and writing is taken. In this way, children's skills across the curriculum are developed successfully. Children are making good progress from their starting points across the curriculum. As a result, they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Staff in early years are skilled in asking questions that probe children's understanding and deepen their thinking. For instance, during the inspection, a child planting marigold seeds explained what the seeds needed for growth and what would be going on underneath the surface as the seed germinated.
- We also looked closely at the school's curriculum. The curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of experiences that interest them. For instance, they like the trips and find art exciting. Pupils' books demonstrate a range of experiences across the curriculum. Nevertheless, pupils do not always develop secure skills from these experiences. For example, work to explore key figures in history does not develop their skills as historians, and drawing aerial maps does not develop key geographical skills. This means that their knowledge and understanding are not deep or secure.
- Across the wider curriculum, expectations are not as high as in pupils' writing and mathematics books. Learning does not always challenge the most able pupils well enough to help them connect their thinking or build sequences of skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of the wider curriculum contains sufficient detail and sequences of learning to build secure skills, knowledge and understanding
- the most able pupils are challenged by teaching that extends their thinking so that they make consistently good progress from their starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met regularly together. I also met with staff and members of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with the federation improvement partner. I reviewed documentation, including: the school's own information about pupils' achievement; the school improvement plan; and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

Together, we visited classes across the school. In lessons, I observed pupils learning, looked at their books, and spoke to pupils about their work. I had a meeting with pupils to gather their views of the school. I took into account the views of parents I met on the playground, and also considered 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including nine free-text comments.