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Mr Andrew Browne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Browne

Short inspection of Wantage Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 July 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. When you were appointed in September 2018, you established quickly an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You and your senior leaders are ambitious for your pupils and have high expectations of what they can achieve. With this in mind, you have focused your activities sharply on improving the school. With effective support from the Vale Academy Trust, you have implemented a range of successful strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You have given staff the training that they need to implement these effectively. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points. In 2018 at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was above the national average.

The governors share your ambition and vision for the future of the school. They provide you with an effective balance of support and challenge. Governors undertake monitoring visits and routinely scrutinise the information that you give them. For example, they monitor the impact that additional funding has on outcomes for pupils. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement.

At the time of the previous inspection you were asked to raise pupils' attainment in writing and to ensure that pupils' work is challenging enough, especially for the most able pupils. You were also asked to improve the school's partnership with parents. You have tackled successfully these areas for improvement. The

proportions of pupils who attained greater depth in writing at the end of key stage 1 have increased over the past three years. At the end of key stage 2 the proportions of pupils who attained the expected standard and greater depth over the past three years have been consistently in line with the national averages.

You have successfully created a learning environment that is calm and purposeful. Children make a good start to their education in the early years. Teachers carefully plan a wide range of activities, both indoors and outdoors, that engage children in their learning. Children play and learn together sensibly. They listen attentively to adults and focus intently on their tasks. For example, children were engaged in very positive play in the 'car wash', taking their different roles very seriously. Some wrote down their customers' details while others organised the washing of the vehicles. Throughout the rest of the school, most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They work with high levels of concentration and a commitment to do their best. Routines are well embedded so that transitions within and between lessons are calm and orderly and no learning time is wasted. Pupils work well collaboratively, sharing their understanding and discussing their ideas confidently. There does, however, remain some variation in the quality of teaching. Occasionally, some pupils lose interest in their learning and go off task. While this is not disruptive to the learning of others, for these pupils their learning slows.

You have taken effective steps to improve parents' confidence in the school and to involve parents in their children's learning and the life of the school. While some parents remain dissatisfied with the work of the school, most parents welcome the improvements that they have seen since you joined the school. Many commented that the school is friendly, welcoming and approachable and that communication between school and parents has improved. Many also commented on the positive experience that their children have in school. As one parent stated, 'I'm really pleased with the progress that my children are making at Wantage CE. The school staff are dedicated to getting the best outcomes for them. They have my children's best interests at heart and their progress is always at the forefront of their minds.'

Pupils say that school is a friendly place to be and that they enjoy coming to school. At break and lunchtimes, pupils mostly play well together, playing organised ball games and table tennis, for instance. For a small number of pupils, however, play can become a little boisterous at times. Pupils feel well supported by the adults in school and confident that adults will help them to resolve any incidents of unkindness. They say that bullying is not tolerated and on the rare occasions that it does occur, it is dealt with quickly. Most parents agree with this view. As one parent said, 'The school helped us with managing bullying that was affecting my child. They continued to have regular meetings with us until we were satisfied that the situation was fully resolved'. A number of parents, however, continue to have concerns about bullying and pupils' behaviour and do not feel that it is always dealt with as effectively as it should be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a culture of vigilance throughout the school, where pupils' safety and well-being are paramount. You have ensured that your safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose so that pupils are kept safe from harm. All adults working in school are provided with thorough training so that they have a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. They know what to do and who to report to if they have any concerns about pupils' welfare.

The school's designated safeguarding team work closely to ensure that vulnerable pupils and families receive the support that they need, working with external agencies when required. Safeguarding records are detailed and thorough. You have plans to refine your record-keeping, however, to ensure that it is even more efficient and effective. You have ensured that all the appropriate pre-employment checks on adults working in school are completed. The records of these checks are thorough and well organised. The safeguarding governor undertakes regular monitoring visits to the school to check thoroughly on the school's safeguarding procedures and the work of the pastoral support team.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on the following aspects of the school's work: how effectively the most able pupils are challenged in their writing; the quality of provision for disadvantaged pupils; and the quality of teaching in mathematics in key stage 2.
- You and your senior leaders, with support from the Vale Academy Trust, have provided staff with effective training and guidance to improve the quality of teaching in English. You ensure that pupils' progress is tracked carefully. You use this information to identify pupils who may require interventions in order to make the progress that they should, or to provide additional challenge. For instance, 'budding author' sessions, for the most able pupils, deepen and extend pupils' understanding and application of complex language. In these sessions, pupils write with increasing maturity, experimenting with language and developing their 'writer's voice'. Teachers also plan a wide range of opportunities for pupils to write across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 4 wrote diaries from the viewpoint of one of Henry VIII's wives. In this writing, pupils not only applied their writing skills to good effect, they also applied their history subject knowledge with accuracy and confidence.
- The most able pupils make strong progress from their starting points in writing. Younger pupils apply their knowledge and understanding of punctuation and phonics with increasing accuracy in their written work. Over time pupils begin to use increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and a greater variety of sentence structures to make their writing lively and interesting. Pupils develop a neatly, joined style of handwriting. Some pupils, however, do not take as much pride in the general presentation of their work, which is untidy at times.
- You have set high expectations for disadvantaged pupils and are ambitious for what they can achieve. You ensure that support is put in place to overcome any

barriers to learning that these pupils may have. For example, the school's emotional literacy support assistant provides support for pupils' emotional well-being. Additionally, targeted mathematics and English interventions are used effectively to enable disadvantaged pupils to improve their attainment and progress. You monitor closely the progress that these pupils make. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make strong progress from their starting points and the gap in attainment between them and other pupils is closing quickly.

- The mathematics leader has developed a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics across the school. Teachers plan learning following a 'do it, secure it, deepen it' approach. Pupils are given a range of challenging opportunities to practise and apply their skills to reason and problem solve in different contexts. Teachers have strong mathematical subject knowledge. They explain concepts and model learning well, using accurate mathematical vocabulary. They identify and tackle pupils' misconceptions swiftly, providing pupils with additional support if needed. Teachers make effective use of practical resources and pictorial representations to support pupils' conceptual understanding. Consequently, in mathematics pupils make good progress from their starting points. Pupils develop a secure understanding of number and calculation. They confidently tackle calculations and problems of increasing difficulty, using mathematical vocabulary to articulate their understanding accurately.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the quality of teaching so that all teaching matches that of the best
- they further improve pupils' behaviour for learning so that pupils consistently do their best and present their work neatly.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Oxford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Leah Goulding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss the work of leaders and the school's self-evaluation. In addition, I held a meeting with members of the governing body and met with the chief executive officer of the Vale Academy Trust.

Together with you or your senior leaders, I visited six classes across the school. We observed pupils learning and spoke to pupils about their work. I also looked at work in pupils' books with your mathematics and English leaders. During break and lunchtime, I spoke informally with pupils, asking them for their views on the school.

I reviewed a range of relevant documents from the school website and some provided by you and your team, including information about pupils' attainment and progress. The school's safeguarding arrangements were scrutinised, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff. I spoke to parents at the end of the school day and also took account of 78 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 43 free-text responses. I also took account of 40 responses to the staff survey.