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Mrs Nicola Fountain
Rothersthorpe Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Fountain

Short inspection of Rothersthorpe Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 2013.

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 driven improvements across the school. The governing body recognises your strengths and the impact you have had on improving teaching and pupils' outcomes. The student council is involved in school developments and this directly influences changes around the school, for example a new play area is being built following planning and design by the pupils.

You, other staff and the governing body have created a culture where both parents and pupils feel that everyone is valued as an individual. Teachers know the children well, not only in their own class but across the school. The strong ties with the community support the caring environment beyond the school gates.

Pupils achieve well across the school in reading, writing and mathematics; however, pupils' progress in mathematics by the end of key stage 2, and the numbers of pupils achieving greater depth in key stage 1, is not as strong as in other subjects.

Pupils value their teachers; they like the humour their teachers display but know that there are clear boundaries and high expectations of both their attitudes to learning and behaviour. Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and they are polite and well mannered. They listen attentively in class and learning behaviours are consistently positive.

Pupils understand the values of the school and can talk about them with confidence. They are proud that the names of the school houses are based on local people representing the importance of perseverance because 'at our school we never give up'.

Parents are positive about the school. Most parents who spoke to me and responded to the online questionnaire agreed that their children are safe, happy and well taught at the school. Friday reward assemblies are well attended by parents and this special time is valued by both parents and pupils.

Physical education and sport remain a strength of the school curriculum, with a range of sport taught in school and in after-school clubs, which has led to success in local and regional level competitions. In response to parent questionnaires, you have introduced a greater range of after-school clubs and these have been well received and attended by your pupils.

Governance is effective and has improved over recent years with secure monitoring procedures in place. Governors constantly evaluate the school's progress, including detailed analysis of pupil data. Governors take time to come into school to participate in events and are beginning to actively promote the school in the wider community. Governors know the school well.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to develop pupils' progress in writing to match that of reading and mathematics across the year groups. Writing has improved and in 2017, 92% of pupils attained standards typical of their age in writing at the end of key stage 2. At the end of key stage 1, attainment in writing was above average and in the top 10% of all schools nationally. There has been an investment in new resources that have helped staff plan for greater challenge for the most able pupils. A focus on extending vocabulary across the school is having a positive impact on pupils' writing. During the inspection, the pupils spoke with enthusiasm about Word of the Day tasks and how they use these words in their independent writing. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' writing skills in subjects other than English are not consistently high across all year groups.

Leaders were also asked to improve the use of modern technology to encourage pupils to write and improve aspects such as spelling. Investments in new laptops, screens and tablets, alongside well-planned staff training, mean this is now embedded across the curriculum. You have visited schools in Finland to see excellent practice abroad and this has had a significant impact in the classroom. The training and investment in technology has also supported improvements in how teachers assess pupils' learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff are highly vigilant of pupils' welfare. Staff and governors receive regular training and know the signs to look out for when checking pupils' welfare. They know that any concerns they have about a pupils' well-being must be shared with the safeguarding leaders.

Safeguarding records are detailed and stored securely. The vice-chair of the governing body makes regular checks to make sure they remain robust. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when online. Pupils say behaviour is good in the school. They confidently told me they feel safe and that, if needed, an adult will always help them. The 'buddy' system across the school is popular with the younger children. Knowing they have an older buddy helps them feel safe on the playground and pupils mix well across the year groups. Your focus on pupils' mental health and well-being means pupils who are vulnerable receive timely support through counselling or additional support from the headteacher.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 rose in 2017. However, this remained below the national average and you recognise that even more children could be achieving this milestone. Your leader responsible for mathematics has worked effectively to introduce more opportunities for pupils to apply their understanding to solve mathematical problems. Staff training and support in the classroom is clearly starting to impact positively on how pupils are learning in mathematics. Regular assessments and rigorous tracking enable you to accurately target pupils to reach greater depth. However, in pupils' work we saw some over repetition of tasks. Sometimes, tasks were not consistently challenging for the most able pupils. Occasionally, they do not move on to more challenging work quickly enough. Consequently, sometimes these pupils do not make the progress they should.
- You have clearly identified that some prior-middle-attaining pupils do not make sufficient progress across key stage 2 in mathematics. Leaders have carried out extensive research, visiting other schools to gather ideas to better support pupils' learning. You have made focused and measured decisions on the best approach for your pupils and have shared new ideas with staff. The subject leader supports other teachers in class and regular staff meetings are helping staff identify good practice in books. Children are starting to use more real-life examples in their mathematics work. For example, in Year 3 and 4 pupils completed a 'Dragon's Den' style task and pupils in Year 5 and 6 learned mathematics through a shopping task. However, sometimes teachers do not use information about pupils' learning well enough to ensure that tasks are matched accurately to pupils' abilities.
- Leaders are on a journey with developing the curriculum in pursuit of pupils making strong progress across all subject areas and attaining highly. Leaders are developing robust systems using regular assessments to track the progress pupils are making across a range of subjects, such as history, geography and art. This leads to quick identification of gaps and, as a result, teachers adapt the curriculum to closely meet pupils' needs. For example, pupils in Year 5 and 6 are now completing a second local study to deepen their understanding. You are developing a portfolio of pupils' work to help teachers maintain high expectations of both progress and attainment for each curriculum subject. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to explore learning in subjects across the curriculum and

are challenged to use higher-order thinking skills. However, this is not consistent across all subjects.

- We saw in books that teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of their work across the wider curriculum subjects are not as high as they are in English and in mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff check more closely pupils' understanding of their learning during mathematics lessons and adapt tasks more quickly to ensure that pupils are challenged to make faster progress
- pupils are given appropriately challenging work across all areas of the curriculum
- all staff have higher expectations of the presentation of pupils' written work in all subjects.

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

Rebecca Ellers
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and the school bursar. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils as you and I visited every class together to see learning take place. I also spoke with a group of six pupils and with several parents as they brought their children to school. I heard two pupils read. I considered views of parents through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Together, we examined a range of pupils' books. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including those related to the safeguarding of pupils, the school's improvement plan and its self-evaluation.