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Mr Nick Brompton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brompton

Short inspection of Castor Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. There have been several staff changes in the last two years. In May 2017 your deputy headteacher joined the school and you were appointed as headteacher in September 2017. Four of the eight classteachers have also joined the school since the previous inspection.

You and your deputy headteacher have made a significant and positive difference since taking up your leadership roles. In both 2016 and 2017, published assessment information shows that standards had dipped. Pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics were not good enough because pupils did not make enough progress. Your determination to improve outcomes has got the school rapidly back on track so that current pupils are receiving a good and improving education and most are making good progress. Consequently, the unvalidated results for 2018 are more positive and they reflect the hard work of staff and pupils over the past academic year.

Your focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards has secured the confidence of governors, staff, parents and pupils alike. Almost all parents are pleased with the school under your leadership. Many recognise the improvements you and your deputy headteacher have made in the last year. Nonetheless, some parents would like their children to be challenged to achieve more in their lessons.

You have high expectations of staff and since taking up post have introduced many new approaches to improve outcomes for pupils. For example, you have put in place more focused meetings to rigorously review the progress of all pupils. You have also tightened up assessment systems to help teachers and leaders identify and support pupils' needs more effectively. Staff members have responded well to your clear direction and the training you have provided for them. You and your deputy headteacher closely monitor the quality of teaching to make sure that these approaches are being used consistently across the school.

In your leadership roles, you and your deputy headteacher are supported well by the strong and knowledgeable governing body. You have also received appropriate and helpful guidance from the local authority. However, you identify that, in this small school, you and your deputy headteacher are both trying to undertake too many roles of responsibility. You and the governors acknowledge that you need to develop the leadership team's capacity to share some of the workload and raise standards further. You are currently training middle leaders with the necessary skills to play a more active part in monitoring teaching and learning effectively and leading improvements in their areas of responsibility.

Children get off to a good start in the early years provision. Throughout their time at school, pupils appreciate their teachers and teaching assistants, who they describe as 'calm and helpful'. Pupils are happy, friendly and polite. They speak confidently about the school's Christian values, which are reinforced through assemblies and in lessons. They told me that these values 'help us to make friends and help each other'. Many parents agree that their children are encouraged to be respectful and caring. One parent, typical of the comments made, stated, 'Our children are taught to be accepting, kind, thoughtful and to work and play hard.' Older pupils enjoy the numerous opportunities they have to develop leadership skills in school, such as being librarians, undertaking tasks in the school office at lunch time and helping the youngest children to settle into school. They told me that these additional responsibilities teach them to be independent and 'learn important skills for adult life'.

You and your governors are not complacent and recognise that the school can be even better. You have identified clear priorities for development and are taking the right steps to achieve them through your focused improvement plans. You and your governors know that pupils' progress will only continue if teaching improves further and expectations remain high. You are working with the staff team to secure these improvements so that pupils continue to achieve well.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, governors and staff work hard to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Rigorous checks are carried out on all adults who work or volunteer in the school.

Staff receive regular and helpful training to ensure that they know their safeguarding duties. You and the other lead persons for safeguarding have effective

systems to make sure that staff know what to look out for and that potentially vulnerable pupils are quickly identified. Where there are concerns, you take swift action to support these pupils, including making referrals to the local authority where appropriate. You are tenacious in making sure that referrals are followed up and action taken where needed. You keep detailed and well-organised records.

Pupils told me that they are well looked after in school. They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including when online. Pupils say that bullying in the school is rare and they can talk to the adults in the school if they have any concerns. Parents who completed the online questionnaire overwhelmingly stated that their children are happy and safe at Castor Church of England Primary School.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we agreed some key lines of enquiry to explore so that I could be satisfied that the school remains good. Firstly, I considered the quality of provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Although these pupil groups are small in the school I wanted to find out whether the additional government funding for these pupils is well spent so that they make the best possible progress. You and your leaders recognise that in 2016 and 2017 disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities did not always achieve as well as they should in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- The achievement of these pupils has been a priority in your improvement plans. Governors ensure that funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is used effectively. They review the success of your chosen teaching approaches regularly at governing body meetings and challenge you and your leaders if pupils are not making rapid enough progress.
- You and your staff know the barriers to learning for these pupils well. Pupils at risk of falling behind in their learning are identified quickly and given additional support. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has quickly identified the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and organised appropriate support. Staff have received training to deliver intervention programmes which are monitored regularly so that teaching, including programmes of support, is well suited to pupils' needs.
- Work in pupils' books and your assessment information from the previous academic year show that disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are now making better progress from their different starting points.
- Another line of enquiry focused on how well you and your teachers ensure that the needs of middle-attaining pupils and most-able pupils are being met, so they make strong progress and consequently attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Outcomes in 2016 and 2017 show that the proportion of pupils attaining greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2, and the higher standards at the end of Year 6, varied too much because the progress some pupils made was not good enough. You have correctly identified that middle-attaining pupils and most-able pupils are at times

not challenged to reach their potential because teachers' expectations of what these pupils can achieve have been too low.

- During the inspection, we saw that in some lessons pupils were not always moved on quickly enough or provided with open-ended tasks that motivated them to think for themselves. This was also evident in some of the pupils' work books from the previous academic year. Although assessment information in 2018 is more positive, your improvement plans rightly include ensuring that teachers always offer pupils the appropriate level of challenge in reading, writing and mathematics across all year groups. You are keen to ensure that pupils are not provided with repetitive work to complete before moving them on to more demanding tasks.
- Finally, I looked at how leaders are ensuring that pupils achieve well in mathematics across the school. Improving the quality of teaching in mathematics was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Published assessment information in 2016 and 2017 shows that, compared to national results for the last two years, pupils did not achieve as well in mathematics as they did in reading and writing.
- On joining the school, you swiftly carried out a thorough review of provision in mathematics. You identified that pupils had some gaps in their learning of basic mathematical skills, so were not always confident in applying their knowledge to solving problems. Pupils also needed to develop stamina in completing their calculations efficiently. Your experienced mathematics leader has led training for staff to tackle these areas and improve the quality of teaching. You have also put in place a chosen, consistent approach to teaching mathematics and this is supporting teachers' planning to meet pupils' next steps in their learning.
- As a result of these focused actions, work in pupils' books, displays around the school and the school's assessment information for 2018 demonstrate that most pupils throughout the school are now making better progress in mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the role of middle leaders is developed further to strengthen and enhance the school's capacity for continued improvement
- more middle-attaining and most-able pupils reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

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 Peterborough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together you and I visited all classes across the school. I observed teaching and learning in lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke informally with pupils. I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss progress since the previous inspection. We also discussed outcomes for children and pupils and the impact of decisions leaders have made. I also met with your SENCo and your leader for mathematics.

I spoke to the vice chair of the governing body and another governor. I met with the senior school standards and effectiveness adviser from the local authority to discuss their work with the school. I also met with a group of pupils more formally to talk about their school experience.

I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including: the school's improvement plans; leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; your records of monitoring and evaluation; minutes of governing body meetings; reports of governor visits; and the school's assessment information for all year groups. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. A discussion was held with you and your deputy headteacher, as two of the school's designated safeguarding leads.

Additionally, I took into account the 39 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 38 free-text responses from parents. I also analysed the 42 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, and the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.