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Dear Miss Wiles

Short inspection of The Holbeach St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. On meeting you and the team, your collective passion to provide pupils with the best possible opportunities is obvious. You say that working at the school is a privilege. Since the last inspection, you and the team have experienced significant events that have impacted heavily on the life of the school. However, you have worked together to come through this and have ensured that the focus has remained fixed on the needs of pupils at the school.

You and the leadership team have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school is part of the Griffin Federation of Schools. You work closely with the other schools in the federation to provide pupils with the benefits of a larger school within a small-school setting. The expertise of subject leaders and of those who support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is shared across the federation. You ensure that the school receives high-quality and bespoke training to develop the skills of teachers. Staff are proud to work at the school. Many believe that the support provided by the leadership team has enabled the school to improve further.

Occasionally, the use of assessment information has not been sharp enough to carefully monitor the progress that pupils make between key stages. Teachers' expectations in science are sometimes not high enough and pupils could make stronger progress.

In the last inspection report, you were asked to provide the most able pupils with tasks that are sufficiently challenging. You have revised the curriculum for mathematics to ensure that teachers provide pupils with opportunities to deepen their understanding and to apply their skills to different problems. Challenge for all pupils has been a focus of whole-school performance management to ensure that teachers plan for all pupils' needs. However, sporadically some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not ambitious enough.

You were also asked to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation. You have put in place a consistent approach to developing pupils' handwriting. Pupils show pride in their work and their books are typically presented well. Teachers develop pupils' spelling through a systematic approach grounded in pupils' phonic knowledge.

Pupils talk of being part of 'one big family'. They enjoy the opportunities to take part in activities that enhance their learning, such as 'The Young Americans' expressive arts project. They have a good understanding of different cultures and religions and talk about the need for tolerance and understanding. As part of the school's safety week, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including out on the roads and while using the internet. Pupils said that the internet can be 'useful and dangerous'.

During the school day, I observed pupils being polite and courteous towards each other and adults. Teachers regularly praise pupils' good manners and have high expectations of behaviour. Pupils have a good understanding of the school's values of wisdom and knowledge, koinonia (fellowship), respect and perseverance. They know what these mean in their daily lives and strive to live by them. Staff manage the very rare incidents of poor behaviour well.

Parents I spoke with, or who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire, were highly complimentary about the work of the school. They said that should they have a problem, there is always someone available to talk with and staff resolve issues quickly. Parents appreciate the caring ethos and 'family feel' at the school. They believe that staff support their children well.

Governors have a secure understanding of the needs of the school within the overall context of the federation. They are resolute that the school receives the leadership time it needs. They have ensured that the needs of the larger school in the federation do not overshadow the needs of the school. Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement. They have been highly supportive of you and the school's staff, pupils, parents and carers during a very difficult period.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are the designated safeguarding lead across all three schools in the federation. The head of school ably supports you and, together, you ensure that all safeguarding concerns are reported quickly and followed up in a timely fashion.

Due to your experience of managing safeguarding across the federation, you have a comprehensive understanding of how to access support for families. The school makes use of the expertise within the federation to support pupils' needs, for example by providing support from the pastoral support worker if required.

You and the head of school understand that staff need to have the knowledge and skills to recognise and pass on safeguarding concerns. Staff receive daily safeguarding briefings including reminders about practice and procedure, training and updates about concerns within the school. Due to some staff living and working within the local community, you pose scenarios for staff to consider what they would do were a concern to arise about someone they know.

During my discussions with staff, it was clear that they have a comprehensive understanding of their requirement to pass on concerns immediately. They are vigilant about possible issues in the local community and are determined to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- Due to the small number of pupils on roll, teachers review the curriculum annually to consider the variations in cohort sizes and the changing structure of classes. As the school is small, staff plan with teachers across the federation while making sure that the needs of the pupils in their class are met. They carefully track the content covered by different year groups to ensure that pupils do not repeat or miss out elements of the curriculum.
- Most teachers skilfully plan for the different abilities and ages of pupils. They use their knowledge of what pupils can do to ensure that tasks match their abilities. Typically, teachers' expectations are high and they provide pupils with additional challenge to further their knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils in Year 3 used their knowledge of addition and subtraction to prove 'greater than' or 'less than' problems.
- Infrequently, teachers' expectations of what pupils should be able to achieve are not ambitious enough, and a small minority of pupils do not make as much progress as they are capable of.
- You are determined to provide your pupils with stimulating experiences that bring their learning to life. For example, pupils in key stage 2 participated in a Second World War evacuee experience including a journey on a steam train, trekking through fields from the station and visiting the houses where evacuees were billeted.

- You have ensured that teachers provide pupils with a range of opportunities to learn in the wider curriculum. Topics are often a stimulus to develop pupils' writing skills across the curriculum. Occasionally, teachers' expectations of pupils' scientific skills are not high enough. Activities provided are not challenging enough for some pupils to investigate, observe and predict in more depth.
- Your monitoring of the progress that pupils make between key stages has not been sharp enough to clearly identify weaker progress. A few pupils have not made as much progress as they are capable of. You have recently put in place a new approach to monitor how well pupils are performing between key stages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment information is used carefully to monitor the progress that pupils make between key stages
- teachers have ambitious expectations for all pupils
- teachers have high expectations in science and challenge pupils to explain what is occurring, predict what will happen and analyse causes.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the head of the school and the chair of governors. I spoke with the mathematics and English leaders. I also met with your staff. I spoke with six pupils from Year 1 to Year 6, as well as pupils in lessons. We toured the school together and observed learning taking place during the morning.

During our tour of the school, I scrutinised a selection of pupils' workbooks. I examined a range of the school's documentation including the self-evaluation document, improvement plan and documents relating to safeguarding. I considered published and internal information about pupils' attainment and progress.

I considered the views of parents, gathered by speaking with them before school. I also considered the four responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I analysed the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.