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13 April 2016

Nigel Evans
Headteacher
Parrett and Axe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Mosterton
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Dear Mr Evans

Short inspection of Parrett and Axe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2016, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Your school is a happy place where pupils arrive from the playground in high spirits; smiling, excited, and full of hope and interest at the day ahead. Parents, staff and pupils all used the words 'open and transparent' to describe the caring, friendly atmosphere at Parrett and Axe. They reported that pupils work and play together well in a supportive, caring environment. The school is highly regarded and popular within the local community, as reflected by the high number of applications for school places and increasing number of pupils on roll.

Your approach to developing the conditions that enable effective learning to take place is striking from first entering the school. Adults encourage pupils to respect each other and to play their part as responsible members of the wider school community. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and are naturally at ease with their peers. Clear aims and values are at the heart of your approach and underpin the actions of those who work and learn here. Values such as equality, democracy and tolerance are strongly promoted and taken very seriously by pupils. They understand that such qualities are helping them to become responsible citizens of the future.

Alongside your strong commitment to developing pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding sits an equally determined ambition that pupils will also thrive academically. You have created a manageable system to support the learning and progress of the different age groups in each class. You check the progress pupils are making regularly on an individual basis and are aware that your system will continue to evolve to align with the nationally changing arrangements for assessment. Teachers use the information to meet pupils' needs well and link learning to interesting topics covered on 'Find out Fridays'.

It is clear that you have robustly tackled the two issues from the previous inspection. Your focus on improving the presentation of pupils' work and the behaviour of younger pupils has been very effective. Work in pupils' books and displays around the school show that pupils are writing accurately and presenting their work carefully. Younger children in Reception, and across the school, behave very well. Their keen attitudes to learning play a strong part in the good progress they are making.

When pupils leave (in Year 6), they do so with a good foundation in reading, writing and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Attainment has been at least average in these areas in recent years and often above. You, your staff and governors have worked hard to improve mathematics this academic year following a dip in the 2015 results and this is proving effective. Disadvantaged pupils, though very small in number, achieve well. Their attainment compares favourably with pupils from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. You are working hard to help some boys catch up which had resulted from previous disruption to their learning. While some progress is evident, you are aware that this work needs to continue with increasing urgency.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your strong emphasis on pupils' personal development promotes their positive behaviour where politeness and courtesy are the norm. De-escalation strategies are emphasised through your anti-bullying and behaviour approaches. Your strong commitment to pupils' safety is demonstrated through your plans to further develop your work on 'e-safety'. Whilst your current approach is perfectly adequate, you feel greater involvement from staff, pupils, parents and governors would further enhance this area. You work closely with the inclusion leader to make effective links with external agencies to cater for vulnerable pupils.

All involved in the school community are deeply committed to keeping pupils safe. You make sure that all necessary checks are made to confirm that those who wish to work with children are suitable. Training for safeguarding and child protection is up to date, regular and welcomed, enabling staff and governors to carry out their duties fully. Pupils and parents are confident that issues are followed up. All parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe at school. Pupils are knowledgeable about matters of safety thanks to a range of carefully planned activities across the curriculum. Daily routines, such as walking across the busy main road, are used to reinforce aspects of road safety well. Overall, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- You, your staff and governors are immensely proud of your school community. You adopt a 'sensible risk-taking' approach, but are not complacent. This creates a culture where there is always room for improvement. Your ambition and drive for pupils' successful learning, in its broadest sense, are embraced by staff at all levels. It is clear that everyone enjoys playing their part in making life at Parrett and Axe a vibrant and enjoyable experience for pupils.
- Staff subscribe to your vision. They value being members of the school team and this permeates their work. You draw on your partnership work with the Beaminster Pyramid group of schools well to identify what can be learned from the latest educational thinking. You capitalise wisely on the opportunities the collaborative work provides. For example, teachers work closely to check the quality of pupils' work in each school and benefit from training and sharing their expertise.
- Governors provide a good degree of challenge for the school. They find out about what is typically happening through regular visits. Minutes of meetings illustrate frequent checks and questioning on a wide range of different matters. Governors are familiar with the broad messages from the headteacher's report and local authority notes of visits. However, on occasion, governors do not follow up to check that planned actions are successfully addressing any recommendations. As a result, it is not always clear how well planned actions are improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.
- Your governors have rightly asked why standards in mathematics are not matching those achieved in other subject areas. Our joint book scrutiny pointed to some variation in practice across the school. Pupils in the Year 1 and Year 2 class build on their skills well. Bright and engaging teaching is promoting pupils' enthusiasm for mathematics. Precise questioning to check pupils' conceptual and procedural knowledge is helping pupils overcome barriers to learning and make rapid progress. Older pupils cover a broad range of activities and topics. However, work in their books lacks the same depth of learning. This is particularly the case for the most-able pupils and is holding them back from reaching their potential.
- Teaching is monitored through a variety of means and a range of information. While records of lesson observations provide some 'broad-brush' statements on pupils' learning, they do not capture well enough the precise gains in pupils' knowledge, skills or understanding. When we looked at pupils' mathematics books from Years 3 to 6 together, you were quick to identify the lack of variety in problem solving to stretch fully the most-able pupils. In a similar way, you, staff, governors and leaders recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure that the most-able pupils are fully challenged in all subjects.

- You have managed the staff changes in Reception this year well. Current staff have worked hard to redress the lower performance of boys in writing and number. Boys are therefore growing in confidence when writing due to the additional emphasis, inside and outdoors, on writing activities. For example, they enjoy using writing labels to support them to attempt complex words. Pupils build on this good early start to achieve standards in the Year 1 phonics (letters and the sounds they make) check that are above average.
- Teachers are benefiting from the primary sports premium (additional government funding to increase pupils' participation and competition in school sports) by working alongside specialist coaches to improve their practice. However, the current allocation of expenditure to fulfil the statutory requirements for swimming does not meet the spending criteria as set out by the Department for Education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all pupils are challenged and stretched to reach their potential by:
 - developing the depth of the mathematical curriculum so that pupils, especially the most able, are provided with a greater variety and depth of number problems and puzzles to solve
 - planning and supporting activities enable all boys to catch up rapidly and reach the standards expected for their age.
- monitoring activities are sharpened by:
 - ensuring that lesson observations and work scrutiny focus on precise gains in pupils' knowledge, skills or understanding
 - governors checking the precise impact that planned actions are having on improving pupils' academic achievements.
- the additional funding to increase pupils' participation in physical activity and improve their performance in physical education is used in accordance with the guidance as set out by the Department of Education.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, 14 members of staff and pupils. I spoke with five representatives from the governing body. I accompanied you on visits to classrooms and together we looked at work in pupils' books. I took into account the survey results from Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, together with responses from pupils and staff. I spoke with pupils from across the school to discuss their work and gain their views of the school. I evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation and reviewed a range of other documentation. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding and recruitment arrangements.