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Mrs Margaret Harnden
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harnden

Short inspection of Holt Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 2017, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school responded well to the area for improvement from the previous Ofsted report, which was about raising achievement in mathematics and writing. The provisional scores for the Year 6 pupils who left the school in 2017 show that their progress in both mathematics and writing was above average. Good presentation and spelling, areas criticised in 2012, are evident in pupils' current work. Pupils write as well in other subject areas as they do in their literacy work.

You and the able deputy headteacher are very clear about the responsibilities you each hold, and you work as an effective team. You have delegated appropriate responsibility for individual subjects to other leaders, who monitor and support these areas to good effect. Most staff feel motivated by leaders and managers and agree that the workload is manageable. You are fortunate to have two specialist leaders of education in the school, who are responsible for science and for physical education. The pupils I spoke to were especially enthusiastic about the things they had done in these subjects. In 2016, the most recent year for which science results are available, every pupil in Years 2 and 6 reached at least the expected standard for their age.

You and I visited all the classrooms to see pupils learning. We saw them concentrating hard and enjoying their work. For example, Year 4 pupils very

enthusiastically sang a song to remind them about the use of imperative verbs. We saw teachers asking probing questions to make sure that pupils understood the new things they were learning. Teachers reflect on how well their lessons went. For example, one told me exactly what she wanted to improve and how she would do it. The lessons in Reception and Year 3 showed how mathematical skills are developed through the year groups. In Reception, the children were looking at flat circular and rectangular shapes, talking of 'corners' or 'pointy bits'. By Year 3, they were checking edges and faces and vertices of three-dimensional shapes such as a cone. In both classes, teachers focused on developing mathematical language, encouraging pupils to explain what they thought. The behaviour I saw in lessons was excellent throughout the school.

The governors I spoke with showed that they ask you and other school leaders very challenging questions about the data you give them. They are well organised and have an excellent knowledge of how effectively the school uses its money. The governing body has praiseworthy systems to evaluate and improve its own effectiveness. Governors are aware that some parents want better communication with the school and they have plans to improve this. They are very clear about the strategies they set, for example concerning safeguarding or the promotion of Christian and fundamental British values. Pupils explained to me how the latter work in practice. They showed their knowledge of democracy and told me how they held their own elections.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You liaise as needed with social services or other agencies. Records are detailed and of high quality. They show, for example, that training on how to keep pupils safe is fully up to date for staff at all levels. Those I spoke to were all very clear about the signs they need to be aware of, and what they would do if they had any concerns. Attendance is above average and any absence monitored carefully.

The pupils I spoke to, of all ages, told me that they feel safe in school. In the well-supervised playground, they explained the rules that keep them safe at breaktimes. Year 6 pupils told me that when they were learning about how to stay safe when using computers, they discussed a range of different situations and what they should do. They said that this was a really fun way of preparing them for the future. They said that behaviour is good, and that although some younger children can misbehave staff help them to learn what is acceptable. Most parents and staff also think that behaviour is managed effectively. Although one classroom is small, the staff and pupils use the space very carefully.

Pupils know what bullying is, but said that there is none in the school. They know whom to talk to if they need support. One said, 'If you are upset, teachers will help you.' Another commented, 'Teachers are really understanding.' Year 6 pupils eat with Reception children and look after them in the playground. The parents who responded through 'Parent View' all said that pupils are kept safe in the school. One that I spoke to described it as a 'family school'. Another parent stressed that staff

are ready to support the whole family, and that they know families well.

Inspection findings

- To be sure that the school remains good, I looked at safeguarding and focused on three key lines of enquiry. These were about progress in Reception and Years 1 and 2, the extent to which the school helps individual pupils to catch up and whether the school has a wide enough curriculum.
- You have kept records of the standards that pupils reach in Reception and key stage 1, but have not looked as closely at their progress – whether these standards are high enough given pupils' starting points. This means that you may miss a way of fine-tuning the things you do to improve standards. For example, you have not, as a matter of course, looked back at results of the Year 1 phonics check to see whether the pupils who did not reach the standard expected could have done so, given their ability when they started school or when they left Reception.
- You use data on standards well to decide which areas you want to improve. This has led you, rightly, to identify that you want more children to exceed expectations in Reception and more pupils to reach higher standards in writing in key stage 1. When we walked around the classrooms, we saw work in Year 2 that challenged pupils to apply their knowledge to solving problems and reach a greater depth of understanding in mathematics. However, in 2017, only one of the six pupils who were exceeding the standard expected in writing when they left Reception reached greater depth in this subject by the end of Year 2.
- Overall progress through key stage 2 has been consistently good over the last four years. In general, this progress is being maintained in pupils currently in the school. To unpick areas that might be improved, I checked how well some pupils who fell back in key stage 1 were catching up again in key stage 2. The pupils I chose were not catching up enough. They had exceeded the expected standards in Reception, but the books seen showed that in key stage 2 they are usually given work appropriate for their age rather than work that challenges them to reach a greater depth of understanding. Their mathematics books showed that they are getting almost all their problems right, so might be capable of more.
- Past data suggests that the school usually does well in supporting its few disadvantaged pupils to achieve as they should. In 2017, some of these pupils in Year 6 did particularly well in reading but not quite so well in mathematics. The deputy headteacher was able to show me that this weakness had been identified. A great deal was done during Year 6 to support these pupils, even though test scores did not end up quite as high as the school had expected.
- The school's rich curriculum is one of its major strengths, and you are rightly proud of it. Sport, music and art are strongly in evidence. There are trips out and visitors to the school for every year group. One parent wrote of the 'brilliant author/illustrator visits', which have really brought literature to life for the pupils. You and the deputy headteacher demand that activities 'excite children and capture them'. Your staff are equally committed to achieving this. After they teach a topic, groups of staff work together across year groups to evaluate its

success.

- The indoor and outdoor environments in the Reception class bear witness to the very wide range of experiences on offer. The different areas are very well organised and attractive. Outside, an impressive gardening and environmental area is clearly used well. The spacious covered area outside incorporates a variety of play with water and sand, and building and construction materials, as well as areas to encourage reading and writing. Pupils in various year groups can go into the wider grounds to learn in the 'forest school'.
- Teachers choose topics that they think will be fun and interest pupils, but which will enable them to cover the things they must do in, for example, history and geography. Year 5, for example, carried out an innovative project on local canals, the canal's role in history and geography, and canal art. Year 6 planned and took part in a 'Bake Off' session, involving writing advertisements, selling food and calculating profit, and looking at world-wide issues such as fair trade and air miles. Year 6 pupils also told me about many things that they and younger pupils do to take responsibility, and the competitions that are held, for example in music. One summed it up: 'What a great school! I don't want to leave it!'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they give closer attention to the progress that pupils make from their individual starting points as well as the standards they reach
- pupils who have the potential are fully challenged to exceed nationally expected standards or produce work of greater depth, especially in writing in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Zachary
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher and discussed the school's self-evaluation and improvements since the last inspection. I also met with the early years leader. You and I visited a range of classes to observe pupils' learning. I looked at pupils' work in lessons and scrutinised separate samples of their writing, mathematics and topic work. I looked at a range of documentation, including plans, school policies and safeguarding procedures. I studied information about the progress of pupils.

I spoke to pupils during lessons and playtime and met formally with a group to gather their views. I took account of 52 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with a range of written comments from parents. I also spoke to some parents as they dropped children off at school. In addition, I took account of 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and spoke informally with staff. I met three governors, including the chair of governors. I also spoke by telephone to the school's improvement adviser.