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Mrs Jane Farren
Headteacher
Norton Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Farren

Short inspection of Norton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

As headteacher, you provide inspiring and effective leadership together with a clear vision and strong commitment that every child should reach his or her full potential. You work closely with your capable senior leaders to drive forward improvements. You have created a culture, shared by your staff, to continually look for ways to improve the quality of education at the school. This permeates all your work and, as a result, the school continues to develop and flourish.

You, together with your staff and governors, know your school very well. You have successfully tackled the areas that were identified in the last inspection as needing further improvement. For example, you have worked effectively to improve and develop the quality of teaching in the early years foundation stage so that children are achieving better outcomes. However, you and your leaders are very aware that there is more to do in this respect.

The strengths from the previous inspection have been maintained, but you have not been complacent. The teaching of reading continues to be extremely effective and standards in 2016 in the Year 6 tests were well above average. The new curriculum in mathematics, with a greater emphasis on reasoning and solving problems, provides increasing levels of challenge that stretch the thinking of the most able

pupils to the full. Innovative ways of engaging pupils are helping them to write at length and improving their writing skills. However, some inconsistency remains in the quality of writing across the school. You are taking appropriate steps to improve standards in spelling, although some pupils are not yet completely confident when applying their spelling skills in their own writing.

A key strength of the school is the skilful way you have built very effective relationships with parents, enabling them to become fully involved in their child's learning. Parents hold the school in high regard because of the way you and your staff 'go that extra mile' to get to know them and their child's needs. As a result, pupils, including those from different cultural backgrounds, play and learn together in harmony, enjoying the many and varied experiences the school has to offer.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. Staff are trained well to identify the possible signs of risk or harm and their knowledge and skills are frequently updated. Consequently, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in school, with everyone understanding their role in maintaining pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders are especially vigilant in keeping in contact with families when they travel to other parts of the country for work. The school works effectively with other agencies and services to minimise the risks to pupils in this respect. Parents told me about the high levels of care and support both they and their children receive and how they feel fully included in the life of the school. 'It's like one big family here. It's amazing how teachers have built up my children's confidence,' is typical of comments received during inspection. Because of this close working with families, attendance for the most vulnerable pupils has improved this year.

You and your governors understand fully how to recruit staff safely and all checks and procedures are carried out diligently. All staff are checked carefully before they begin working at the school. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example when working online on the computer. In discussions during the inspection, pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection there have been year-on-year improvements in the progress that children make in the early years foundation stage. As a result of better teaching, the number of children achieving a good level of development has risen and in 2016 was broadly in line with the national figure. This is ensuring that more children start Year 1 as confident and capable learners.
- Staff in the early years know the children well and plan activities that take good account of their differing needs and interests. The increased focus on the next

steps in their learning ensures that children are challenged consistently to make faster progress. Children's language and mathematical skills are developed well when activities capture children's imagination and make learning fun, such as in the 'Chinese restaurant', where children role-play serving 'customers'. Children's writing, especially that of boys, is enhanced when using characters such as 'Sonic the hedgehog' and the 'Gingerbread man' as a stimulus for ideas. However, you and your leaders recognise that there is more to do to accelerate learning so that children make the best possible progress.

- Leaders' effective steps to improve and develop teaching in mathematics are increasing pupils' rates of progress. The new scheme to teach arithmetic skills systematically is having a positive impact on pupils' understanding of number. Strategies to stretch the most able pupils, including any who may be disadvantaged, include a strong focus on solving problems and deepen their understanding when explaining methods for finding correct answers.
- Achievement in mathematics in 2016 was broadly average at the end of key stage 2. However, the work in current pupils' books, especially the most able, shows that they are making stronger progress and are on track to achieve well by the end of the year. Pupils are encouraged to tackle difficult challenges. For example, some Year 6 pupils told me how they built up their resilience when faced with a tricky challenge concerning fractions, which they solved by trying out different methods and discussing possible solutions with each other.
- You all share a vision that the curriculum should be rich and exciting to inspire pupils' writing. Attendance at events such as the Cheltenham Literature Festival enables pupils to meet published authors and gather new ideas. Pupils take great pride in their work and high-quality writing is evident in most classes. You have rightly identified spelling as a priority for further improvement from the slightly below-average outcomes for pupils in the 2016 Year 6 test and have taken clear steps to address this. However, while pupils are learning to spell with increasing accuracy, you recognise that not all pupils are confident in applying their knowledge of spelling to their own writing.
- Pupils explain how teachers encourage them to read frequently and widely, both at school and at home. Consequently, they read to me with fluency and understanding. There is a strong culture of reading in school with plenty of stimulating literature on offer. Those pupils who find reading more challenging use their good knowledge of phonics to read unknown words successfully. This, together with the year-on-year rise in attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check, indicates that the improvements to the teaching of phonics are effective.
- You check attendance carefully to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. Absences are monitored very carefully and helpful actions put in place to support parents where necessary. These practices have improved the attendance of disadvantaged pupils this year, whose absence was higher than that of other pupils but is now falling.
- Pupils are extremely happy in school because of the high-quality care and attention they receive. Their behaviour is very impressive. The school's values of mutual respect and tolerance shine through in all aspects of its work and help to develop a welcoming ethos for all within this culturally diverse school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress across the early years foundation stage continues to accelerate so that more children achieve highly and are well prepared for the start of Year 1
- the teaching of writing is consistently of a high quality across all classes
- pupils become more competent and accurate in spelling and use these skills confidently in their own writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about the progress pupils are making and improvements since the last inspection. We agreed the following key lines of enquiry: how well children achieve in the early years foundation stage; the extent of the school's success in accelerating progress in mathematics, especially for the most able pupils; how well the curriculum had been strengthened to improve standards in writing; and how well the school keeps pupils safe and promotes regular attendance.

I met with a large number of parents informally before the start of the school day. I also held discussions with your senior leaders, two governors and a representative from the local authority. I visited all classrooms with you or one of your leaders. We looked at a range of work in mathematics and writing. I listened to some pupils read and talked to them about school life. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and the school's analysis of attendance information.