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Mrs Kirsti Nelson
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nelson

Short inspection of Norton Fitzwarren Church School

Following my visit to the school on 15 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

The Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust has provided good-quality challenge and support while you have steered school improvement. The trust has held the school to account robustly through an individualised programme of regular visits to check the impact of leaders' actions. As a result, the school has recovered well from a recent dip in its performance. Teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes are now typically good.

Leaders, including the local governing body, have not shied away from taking difficult decisions to enable continual improvement during the school's rapid expansion this year. As a result of a wide-ranging package of staff training and work alongside the partner school, Staplegrove Church School, teachers' expectations and subject knowledge have increased.

At the previous inspection of your predecessor school you were asked to embed pupils' knowledge and understanding of number facts more consistently across the school. Teaching in mathematics is good. Leaders' strategy to improve mathematics teaching even further is effective. Consequently, pupils in most classes are routinely engaged in more challenging work and relish opportunities to reason and solve number problems. A greater proportion of pupils now reach and exceed the

standards of work expected for their age in mathematics.

You were also asked to develop pupils' reading and writing skills so that they know how to improve their work. This work is mostly effective. Pupils respond well to teachers' feedback by making adjustments to their work. However, this is more proficiently done in English and mathematics than in other curriculum subjects. The school's work to develop the teaching of reading is paying dividends. Teachers' questioning usually expects pupils to think hard and explain and justify events in the books they read. However, you know that there is still more to do to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make rapid progress and apply these skills to their independent reading.

Pupil numbers have increased quickly. As a result, the proportion of pupils who enter the school at times other than the usual entry points is high. In most cases these pupils make good progress from the time they arrive. However, a small number of these pupils did not make enough progress last year to gain the skills and knowledge required to meet the standards that are expected for their age.

Leaders, including the trust and local governing body, are working on the right aspects for improvement. However, further work is required so that teachers provide the right level of challenge to enable every group of pupils to make equally strong progress from their different starting points.

Parents are positive about the school: almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, reported that they would recommend it. They believe the school is well led and managed, and almost all say that children make good progress because of the good teaching they receive.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and of high quality. You, along with the other designated safeguarding leaders, work effectively with external agencies to ensure that everything is being done to safeguard children and minimise risk.

Staff are given frequent safeguarding updates through the year. They apply their understanding of their training effectively and so school records show that concerns are dealt with quickly and with appropriate rigour.

The pupils I spoke to during my visit said they feel safe and well looked after. They understand the importance of keeping safe and say that their curriculum helps them develop a good awareness of cyber bullying and keeping safe online.

Inspection findings

To ascertain that the school remained good, a key line of enquiry focused on pupils' progress in reading. This is because pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 were below the national average in 2016 and disadvantaged girls did less well than other pupils nationally.

- The school's leadership strategy to refine the teaching of reading is proving effective. Most pupils can read with fluency and apply their understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) when tackling unknown words. Staff training has enabled teachers to hone their subject knowledge, particularly in teaching comprehension skills. Teachers now routinely use precise questioning techniques to deepen pupils' understanding of what they read. As a result, pupils are well motivated and enjoy the high level of challenge set for them. Pupils say the online reading quizzes help them improve their vocabulary and understanding. However, on occasion, low-attaining pupils do not actively engage in dialogue about the texts they read and this limits their application of the skills they are taught.
- Additional strategies are in place to help those pupils who have previously fallen behind. As a result, these pupils are catching up and making good progress. Pupils in Year 5 have suffered underachievement because of previously weak teaching. While these pupils are catching up you have accurately identified additional strategies to support them so that they reach expected standards.
- Girls read equally well as boys and all benefit from wide-ranging support and varied reading materials. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from specifically targeted support. This is having a positive impact and increasingly these pupils are making good progress.

Another aspect I looked at was the progress that pupils are making from one key stage to another. Last year pupils' progress in writing across key stage 2 was better than in mathematics. In 2016, some middle- and high-attaining pupils made variable progress.

- Workbooks confirm that pupils' progress in mathematics is now good. All pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good and sometimes rapid progress. As a result, those pupils who previously underachieved because of weaker teaching further down the school are catching up quickly. Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Their teaching fully incorporates all aspects of the national curriculum and therefore provides ample challenge for pupils to apply their understanding to solve mathematical problems. Additional teaching sessions enable pupils who have not fully grasped an aspect of mathematics to catch up. Consequently, a greater proportion of pupils are meeting and exceeding the standards that are expected for their age this year.

My third line of enquiry was about how well children progress in the early years from their starting points. For the last two years the proportion of children achieving the 'good level of development' was lower than that achieved by schools nationally.

- Children are calm and well focused in Nursery. I saw children interacting well in the activities on offer. As a result of trust support this year, provision in Nursery has improved and children are better prepared for the Reception Year. Adults' accurate assessments of what children can and cannot do are enabling children to make good progress.
- Children in Reception benefit from a lively learning area inside and out. Many children enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge lower than their age. Current children in Reception are making increasingly good progress. Assessment is regular across all aspects of learning. The vast majority of girls have made strong progress and reach the standards expected for their age. Boys' achievement remains good but their progress is less marked than the girls'.

I also examined the progress that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making to ascertain whether these pupils are achieving the standards of which they are capable, particularly in writing.

- As a result of appropriately challenging teaching pupils organise their writing well and routinely use descriptive language to add detail. Consequently, middle-attaining and the most able pupils in Year 2 are making good and often swift progress in their writing this year.
- Leaders' checks on learning ensure that teachers get specific feedback to improve the teaching of writing further. As a result, teachers have clear actions and next steps for improvement. However, these checks are not sufficiently focused on the progress that pupils make from their different starting points. As a result, gaps in learning are not picked up quickly enough, so a small number of low-attaining pupils in Year 1 are not catching up swiftly enough. This hinders their ability to write with accuracy and at length.

My final line of enquiry was about pupils' attendance. In 2016, some disadvantaged pupils did not attend well enough.

- Overall attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Leaders use wide-ranging external support and processes to tackle any remaining weaknesses. In most cases, this high level of leadership intervention is working, so these pupils' attendance is rising gradually. However, for a few disadvantaged pupils their attendance is stubbornly low. The trust's and governors' school visit records and minutes confirm that they are holding the school firmly to account for reducing absence further. However, leaders and those responsible for governance are acutely aware that there is more to be done to insist pupils attend well, and so maximise pupils' opportunity to learn and make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Trust leaders, school leaders and those responsible for local governance should

ensure that:

- the headteacher is held to account for ensuring that leaders' checks on pupils' learning take into account their prior attainment
- the trust holds leaders to account for ensuring that pupils make rapid and sustained progress so that a greater proportion of pupils exceed the standards that are expected nationally in reading, particularly pupils in Year 5 and those who are disadvantaged
- low-attaining pupils in Year 1 catch up rapidly and make consistently good progress in writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governors, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, senior and middle leaders, and a group of governors. I met with the director of school improvement from the trust. I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and to scrutinise their work. I talked with a group of pupils to gather their views of the school and listened to pupils read.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans, school performance information, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 53 responses to the Parent View online survey, and free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff throughout the inspection.