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Mrs Mary Alexander  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Alexander

### **Short inspection of Horsington Church School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2019, 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 May 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Even though there has been a change of headteacher, you, your staff, the governing body, with support from Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust (BWMAT), have assured the special ethos of this small school. Pupils learn well.

After the previous inspection the school addressed its areas for development through ongoing examination of data and a determined focus on the improvement of teaching and learning. This has brought about more consistency in the achievement of pupils across key stage 2. Attainment and progress has particularly improved in writing and mathematics. Children in the early years foundation stage and pupils in key stage 1 continue to do well.

Since your appointment in September 2018, you have carefully balanced the need for consistency and challenge. This has ensured that the school remains strong and continues to improve. You lead by example and are very proud and committed to the school. You value staff and pupils as individuals and get the very best from them. Staff welcome your honest, thoughtful and problem-solving approach. You have introduced new ways of working so that the small teaching team work effectively together on shared goals with a clear way forward.

Parents are very positive about the school. Many choose this school because members of their family had previously attended and were successful. They are impressed by the atmosphere, the teaching and the environment when they visit.

Nearly all the parents who completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said they would recommend the school to another parent. Typical comments from parents included, 'I cannot think of a better school for my children to start their education'; 'a wonderfully nurturing school' and 'a happy school'.

Pupils work well together in mixed-aged classes. They are very respectful of each other and are very confident as they move around and go about their day. They are proud of their small school where, they say, 'you get to know everyone really well' and 'every day you are welcomed by the teacher'. They are challenged by the work. They enjoy a wide range of music and sports activities. They take responsibilities and raise money for charity. Pupils readily shared their memories of their time at Horsington Church School and the trips and residentials that they have taken part in. They also share events that are personal to them, remembering warmly their positive experience of primary education.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding in the school is underpinned by staff's detailed knowledge of the pupils and their families. Staff are determined to care for everyone and keep them safe. They are vigilant to anything that might be a cause for concern. Where the school has had concerns about individual pupils, they have acted appropriately and contacted external agencies. Pupils trust staff and have confidence in them.

The arrangements for staff recruitment, vetting and training are suitable and up to date. The school receives good support from BWMAT and this strengthens practice in the school and ensures that advice is readily available. The member of the governing body with responsibility for safeguarding has up-to-date knowledge and keeps in close contact with the school. In this way she can assure the governing body of the effectiveness of the school's work.

Pupils talk confidently about how to keep themselves safe. They are aware, for instance, of the need for keeping themselves safe when using the internet. Teaching sessions from external partners have strengthened their awareness of risks. Pupils say that, in general, pupils get on well together. The school has appropriate procedures in place should bullying be reported so this can be dealt with effectively.

### **Inspection findings**

- One of the key lines of enquiry to determine whether the school remains good was to examine the recent improvements in mathematics and their sustainability. The work of the school in this area is underpinned by your own strong knowledge of mathematics and the way children learn. You are clearly well informed and keep up to date with new approaches and resources. You share this knowledge readily so that staff are very clear of the importance of pupils being fluent with mathematical operations and have sufficient opportunities to deepen their knowledge before they move on.

- As a school you have adopted a clear structure that ensures appropriate coverage of different aspects of mathematics. Teachers then supplement this with different resources as appropriate. You have strengthened teaching so that pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and have several different ways to approach mathematical problems.
- Pupils' work in books show that they are developing their skills and knowledge in mathematics well. In lessons, pupils give their full attention and are absorbed in their mathematics. They are appropriately challenged and teaching is successfully deepening and reinforcing their learning. Pupils are challenged to think creatively about mathematics. The regular opportunities to revisit areas of mathematics is helping pupils to become more confident and fluent.
- Older pupils talk about how they know they were likely to forget things over time, but regular, short revision sessions help them. They also say that if they don't understand something the first time it will be covered again. The youngest children are becoming confident mathematicians through a careful balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities. The skills of talking about mathematical problems, however, are not yet developed through the school. Not all pupils have the mathematical vocabulary and listening skills to engage in these activities and get the most out of them.
- Another line of enquiry was to examine how the school ensures that all pupils, whatever their starting point or background, make good progress. Staff know pupils very well. Pupils are welcome at Horsington, whatever their strength, talent or needs. Teachers and teaching assistants adapt their approaches to ensure that pupils' experience at the school is happy and challenging. Teaching ensures that work is well matched to individuals and small groups.
- You have strengthened your procedures to track pupils' achievement as they move through the school. In addition to regular teacher assessments you have recently introduced standardised testing. This allows you to compare progress with other schools. You then use your tracking and test information as well as scrutiny of books and your knowledge of pupils to identify whether any pupil is at risk of not making expected progress. If this is the case, you then carefully consider barriers to learning. Teachers put in place interventions or support to tackle the issues so that pupils' needs are met. You have also strengthened the way pupils review their own work. This means that pupils feedback to the teacher at the end of lessons whether they have understood and whether they need additional help.
- Your work has meant that pupils' progress is carefully monitored and those who need help are quickly identified and a range of tailored interventions put in place. When pupils indicate in their books to their teachers that they are not confident, additional explanation or work is quickly put in place. Older pupils describe specific examples where this has made a difference to their understanding. You are aware that sometimes teaching is not always responsive enough to pick up whether a pupil should be challenged more or needs additional help or guidance.

- The third line of enquiry was to consider whether the new leadership arrangements are effective. The previous headteacher retired after 20 years in post. You were previously the deputy headteacher and have been appointed as headteacher on an interim basis. You continue to teach part time in Year 6. Another teacher left the school recently, which means that two out of five teachers are new to the school. To support you in your first term, the previous headteacher supported you on behalf of BWMAT. Your governors are experienced, supportive and challenging.
- There has been a successful transition of leaders. Teaching and learning has maintained its high quality. The school remains a happy place in which to work, learn and play. The steps you have taken to involve staff in different leadership tasks means that there is a shared language and a team approach to improvement. New staff are being effectively supported.
- Governors work closely with the school to establish priorities and then systematically monitor these closely to ensure impact. BWMAT ensures that the school is supported through regular visits by a regional director for learning and achievement.
- You know the school very well. With the governors, you have clear aspirations for the future; developing the school as part of the wider community and ensuring that its Christian education remains of the highest quality. You were well supported by the previous headteacher, who was invaluable in sharing his deep knowledge as well as encouraging you to develop your own direction. You value the support from your colleague headteachers in your hub group.
- During the inspection it became clear that there is some confusion about the next steps in assuring the permanent leadership of the school. This is causing some unease among staff and governors. It also means that roles and responsibilities are unclear.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils throughout the school have the vocabulary and skills necessary to discuss and reflect on their mathematics so that they deepen their knowledge and probe and remedy their misconceptions
- teaching is responsive to the needs of individuals in lessons so that, when appropriate, pupils are challenged to do more, further challenge themselves or given support to remedy their mistakes
- leadership roles and responsibilities are clarified.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of 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

Stephen McShane  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I held meetings with you, members of the governing body, representatives from BWMAT, all the teaching staff and the deputy safeguarding lead. I spoke with pupils from Year 6 and with many other pupils informally. I made observations of learning in classes and looked at examples of pupils' work. I scrutinised documentation from the school on a range of matters, including safeguarding. I took account of 43 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. I also considered responses of staff to the Ofsted online survey.