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Mr Richard Harley
Headteacher
Tilston Parochial Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Harley

Short inspection of Tilston Parochial Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained and further improved the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your self-evaluation is accurate and reflects your robust analysis of the school's test and teacher assessments, comparing them appropriately with national expectations. Consequently, your school improvement plan focuses on those areas which will best improve the standard of education for your pupils.

You, along with your senior leadership team and governors, have created a wonderful family ethos, where parents feel 'included in the decision-making and direction the school takes' and 'your voice is truly acted upon not just a token'. Parents are confident that any issues raised with leaders will be dealt with swiftly. Older pupils supported and encouraged younger pupils during playtimes and in preparation for the first performance of the key stage 2 play 'A night at the Musicals'.

Parents speak very highly of the school and its staff. They describe your leadership as 'inspirational' and recognise this as a strength of the school. They appreciate the approachability of the staff and share with some pride the growth in confidence of their children. Parents talk positively about the extra support provided for individual pupils. Parents describe the school as 'brilliant'.

Pupils are equally positive about their school. Older pupils state that they 'feel well prepared for the move to high school because they have been taught some things in the way high school does'. They have a very good understanding of how teachers help them to learn, and speak fondly of the positive relationships across and within the school. Pupils told me that one of the best things about their school is that everyone 'values each other's individuality'.

Governors have a good range of skills to support the school's development. They recognise their role in supporting your vision for the school and have demonstrated through their management of the hall and classroom building project that they have a useful and wide set of experience and expertise. A planned programme of visits to school gives members of the governing body a good first-hand understanding of the school's work when sharing and discussing attainment and progress data.

You have given a high priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning because this was an area for improvement at the last inspection. The work pupils are given is now better matched to their assessed learning needs as a result of accurate assessments and more informative meetings to discuss pupils' progress. Pupils feel that the explanations given at the start of lessons are sufficient to allow them to learn and they are confident in asking for further help if they need it. Pupils' books show an improving standard of writing. However, in some classes, spelling and the presentation of work have not improved as rapidly as the content and imagery of their writing.

You have tackled the area for improvement regarding partnerships with a great deal of success. Your role as chair of the local headteachers' group has enabled you to work with colleague headteachers to share good practice across a number of schools. The partnership developed with another school to allow staff to watch each other teach has helped improve the standard of teaching further. Unfortunately, due to staff absence and budgetary issues, the peer observation programme has not continued into the current school year. However, you and your leadership team recognise the value of this strategy and have adapted the timetable to reintroduce it next year.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your leadership team has ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and records are maintained meticulously. The single central record is compliant with statutory regulations. You have ensured that staff and link governors are trained in basic awareness and have a good knowledge and understanding of school procedures. You and a number of governors have undertaken safer recruitment training. Pupils feel safe in this school and parents agree.

Pupils are appropriately protected when accessing the internet. They know that any breaches will be dealt with swiftly and sensitively. Teachers make pupils very aware of their own personal safety through age-appropriate lessons and sessions led by visiting theatre groups and professionals.

Leaders are aware that the significant absence of a small number of pupils last year was due to very specific individual circumstances. You have implemented very good procedures to tackle absenteeism, including letters to families, attendance meetings and liaison with the education welfare officer. As a result of your actions, attendance rates of current pupils and groups of pupils are broadly in line with national averages.

Inspection findings

- Pupils typically attain well in your school due to the good standard of teaching. In 2016, a large number of Year 6 pupils did not make the progress expected of them in writing. You had wanted to ensure that the implementation of the new curriculum was well managed and, particularly, that staff fully understood the rise in expectations and standards. As a result, the changes introduced have not had sufficient time to show the true impact on pupils' writing across all classes and groups of pupils.
- My first line of enquiry, therefore, concerned finding out what you have done to improve writing, particularly for middle-attaining pupils. You have successfully improved the quality of teaching, especially in making sure that teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve. You have also given a greater focus to independent editing and drafting of writing and the application of grammar. As a result of your work, all of these strategies have combined to enable pupils to produce writing which contains more detail and creates the appropriate atmosphere or tone.
- You are pleased with the improvements made to pupils' writing and provided examples to show how pupils in lower key stage 2 use paragraphs to structure their writing. Vocabulary and repetition are used well to create imagery and atmosphere. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' writing shows good progress over the year. Sentences are better structured and the creative placing of words and phrases are most effective.
- Teachers' assessments show that pupils' attainment is currently better than in 2016 because pupils are making stronger progress. Greater numbers of pupils, particularly boys, are meeting the higher expectations that teachers have for their writing. While your work to develop writing has resulted in rapid improvements, spelling and presentation have not improved as quickly. Pupils' application of spelling rules is inconsistent. Some spellings do not reflect rules previously taught.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out more about the progress and attainment of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and of boys in reading. Reading is effectively taught at this school through a varied teaching programme which includes individual support, opportunities to read during the day and guided reading sessions. Year 6 pupils read with confidence. Pupils speak enthusiastically about reading and shared their knowledge of a number of well-known authors and the reasons why they enjoyed reading their books.
- The most able pupils read fluently, with lovely expression and a very good understanding of what they have read. Middle-ability readers have a good range

of skills to read unknown words, including the application of their phonics knowledge and repeating words to gain understanding and meaning. Less-able readers read less confidently and more quietly, but with similar high levels of fluency and intonation.

- Your special educational needs coordinator has a very good understanding of the particular needs of individual pupils. Well-qualified teaching assistants and staff work well with pupils to meet these needs through high-quality teaching activities. Support is based on comprehensive child profiles which document support, progress and identified needs. Good links have been made with external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, which are helping pupils to improve their communication skills.
- Leaders recognise that data in 2016 for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was mixed. Despite the school's best efforts, some lack of parental engagement and specific individual needs meant that the few pupils involved, with the exception of pupils with an education, health and care plan, did not achieve as highly as expected. Currently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are on track to achieve well. Their progress is well monitored through meetings with the special educational needs coordinator, teaching assistants and parents.
- My third line of enquiry looked at how well teaching and learning meet the needs of the most able children in the Reception class. Children enter the early years with standards that are broadly in line with age-related expectations, although due to small cohorts, this fluctuates from year to year. Speech and language development are the main barriers to learning. However, there is good liaison between school staff and the speech and language therapy department to support language acquisition. Additionally, staff have been trained to further meet these needs.
- The teaching of phonics in the early years is very effective because it is well matched to the assessed needs of pupils. Children were engaged in their phonics work and enjoyed showing the teacher how much they had learned. A good balance of activities in continuous provision allows children to practise and develop their understanding of phonics and words.
- Children's books show that they can write several sentences correctly demarcated with capital letters and full stops. They are encouraged and enthused to write through good-quality experiences and an environment which promotes literature. A wonderful full-page retelling of the Rainbow Fish story demonstrated the children's increasing understanding of language and story structure and their stamina for writing.
- Assessments for 2017 show that 58% of children achieved a good level of development, with children making the progress school staff expected of them. Leaders' assessments and work in children's books show that more children are demonstrating standards of work which exceed the good level of development they achieved when results had to be submitted to the local authority. Leaders recognise that they need to adapt their future planning to ensure that children are given the opportunity to demonstrate these higher levels earlier in the school year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they increase the number of children exceeding the requirements of a good level of development in the early years through greater challenge for the most able children
- there are consistent expectations of pupils' presentation and spelling across key stage 2, leading to a higher quality of writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Shackleton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and members of your leadership team, parents and five members of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority. In addition, I talked with small groups of pupils around the school, in lessons and formally. I observed teaching and learning in various classes jointly with the headteacher and scrutinised the writing of pupils across the school. In addition, I listened to pupils read. I examined and discussed a range of documents, including those relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. I looked at the school's self-evaluation of how well it is doing, the school's improvement priorities and its assessment information. I reviewed the school's website. I considered the views expressed by parents through informal meetings and the 42 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View.