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Mrs Lesley McDonald
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McDonald

Short inspection of St Margaret's School, Tintinhull

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have overseen a number of changes to the school in the past four years, not least the addition of the 'Foundation Stage Unit'. This facility, which provides pre-compulsory education for children from the age of two, has enhanced the school's provision and resulted in a higher number of pupils reaching a good level of development at the end of early years. You have recognised that boys were not achieving as well as the girls and, through careful use of funds, you have purchased resources which interest all pupils more, especially the boys. Pupils' reading skills have improved as a result.

The governing body has undergone significant change, with a number of newly appointed governors joining in the past year. The chair of governors is new to this role and he is being supported by a national leader of governance. This supports him carrying out his duties effectively.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and raise the attainment of younger pupils. You have helped staff to plan learning more carefully and to ensure that pupils are clear about how to achieve well. This has been most successful in reading and mathematics but less so in writing.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of pupils in key stage 1 are working at the standard typical for their age.

Pupils enjoy school and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities appreciate the support they receive. This is helping them overcome their individual challenges.

I observed pupils before school, at morning break and at lunchtime playing harmoniously with one another, including older pupils playing with and supporting younger pupils. Pupils of all backgrounds play and work well together. The strong sense of family supports the school's Christian ethos and values. Pupils show good attitudes to their learning and make good progress, although some of the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in their writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong, records are adequately maintained and there are secure arrangements to keep children safe. Staff and governors are appropriately trained and so are aware of the range of risks pupils may face and the signs to look out for, including the risks of female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation. Leaders are acutely aware of the potential for some groups of pupils to go missing from education. They are rigorous in following up each and every case when this may be a risk.

The welfare arrangements for children in the early years are good. All protocols are followed and logged, such as nappy-changing arrangements for some of the youngest children.

Your team is swift to engage other agencies, such as speech and language specialists, when specific needs are identified.

Inspection findings

At the start of this inspection, we agreed the main areas that this inspection would focus on. These included:

- the quality of pupils' writing in key stage 2, particularly by the girls
- how well boys read
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- a review of the attainment of boys in the early years
- pupils' behaviour and leaders' use of exclusion
- the effectiveness of the arrangements to safeguard pupils.

- In early years, children use their phonic knowledge to spell accurately and many are able to write at standards beyond those typical for their age. Across the school, low- and middle-ability pupils are making strong progress in their writing. In all classes, pupils show positive attitudes towards their writing. However, the most able pupils in key stage 2 are not routinely challenged to write at the highest standards and girls do not show the same accuracy in their use of punctuation and grammar or in their spellings as the boys. Some parents who responded to Parent View share my view that their children are not being sufficiently challenged.
- When reading, pupils have access to a wide range of books which are at levels appropriate to their understanding, skills and interests. Pupils who read to me did so with good fluency and sound understanding of what they had read. They are not afraid to try to read books which are more challenging and they showed a real enjoyment in their reading. All pupils commented that they read at home on a very regular basis. However, in Years 3 and 4, boys do not routinely use their good phonic knowledge or other techniques to read unfamiliar words.
- Governors have a clear rationale for the use of the pupil premium which is supporting disadvantaged pupils' emotional needs and improving their academic achievement. When these pupils attend school regularly, their progress is good. However, a large proportion of disadvantaged pupils have high rates of persistent absence and funds have not been used precisely enough to overcome this, and other barriers to learning.
- In early years, the leader, supported by the special educational needs coordinator, is driving up standards rapidly. The proportion of boys reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has improved rapidly. Children currently in early years are making strong progress and almost all children are on track to be working at, or exceeding, the standards expected for their age. A number of factors can contribute to this, not least the activities your staff plan which are well matched to children's interests, especially for boys, for example through projects exploring science and engineering and the celebration of cultural events, such as Chinese New Year.
- The addition of the Foundation Stage Unit in 2014 and its close integration with the rest of the school are having a positive impact. Parents comment that the transition from Nursery to Reception is 'seamless'. The children agree. Children are now arriving in Reception with better skills and understanding than in the past, as a result of the good teaching in Nursery. Children's good phonic knowledge, their writing and their understanding of the concepts of space and shapes demonstrate this. Those children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and receive the additional help they need, such as specialist speech and language therapy, at an early stage. As a result, they make strong progress.

- In recent years, rates of exclusion have been higher than the national average. I explored the reasons behind this and found that the school's behaviour policy is being applied appropriately, including the use of sanctions such as exclusion. I found pupils' behaviour to be good both in class and at break- and lunchtimes. Pupils are polite and well mannered. They play well together. On occasions when staff do have to intervene, their response is swift and proportionate. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and integrate fully into all aspects of school life.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards in pupils' writing in key stage 2 rise further, particularly:
 - through the more accurate use of grammar, punctuation and correct spelling by the girls
 - by increasing the level of challenge for the most able pupils.
- the attendance and punctuality of disadvantaged pupils improve.

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

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, staff, pupils, three members of the governing body, an officer from the local authority and a number of parents. You and I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and to scrutinise their work. I listened to pupils read.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation, the development plans, and attendance, behaviour and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 15 responses to the Parent View online survey, nine responses to the staff survey and 19 responses to the pupil survey.