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Helen Richardson
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Dear Mrs Richardson

Short inspection of John Blow Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 January 2013.

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 built upon the school's ethos of high expectations and collaboration. You have ensured that new staff quickly understand what is expected of them and become part of the school team. Your passion to provide the best for pupils is reflected in the dedication of staff and in the high regard that the community has for the school.

The school provides a well-rounded education that ensures that pupils thrive. Pupils and parents alike appreciate the wide range of opportunities you provide, such as visiting the ballet and the Royal Academy. You place a great emphasis on encouraging pupils' musical talents. All pupils learn to play an instrument during their time at the school. Currently, pupils are learning the guitar or the fife. All the older pupils are part of the uplifting choir. The lively and engaging curriculum means that pupils enjoy school and make good progress from their starting points. Unsurprisingly, pupils attend very well.

Securing pupils' well-being is at the heart of your approach. Many parents commented on the caring and supportive ethos within the school. They said that this has helped their children to flourish. One pupil said, 'Everyone is always looking out for you.' In class, pupils are keen to answer questions and work diligently. You have focused on developing pupils' collaborative skills. As a result, they cooperate well and strive to help each other whenever possible. During breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils play together happily in every corner of the playground. The school's 'buddy' system gives older pupils

responsibility for welcoming and caring for the younger children. Parents comment on how this helps their children settle quickly and confidently.

You are rightly proud of the staff team. Together, you have worked to improve the school further. Staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were unanimous in their support for you and other leaders. One said, 'staff would walk over hot coals' for you.

You give staff a range of leadership opportunities and training. Leaders develop their skills by checking on pupils' work in their books and on the quality of teaching in lessons. As a result, you and other leaders have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and aspects that are not as strong. You have successfully tackled the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Pupils reach high standards in writing because of the many opportunities they have to practise their skills in a range of subjects. You and other staff are now working on improving the teaching of mathematics further. Staff are also developing pupils' higher-level reading skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and pupils feel safe. The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to me, or who responded to Ofsted's online survey, said that their children are safe and happy at school. Staff know the pupils very well and all see the safety and well-being of pupils as high priorities. Pupils said that they know whom to speak to if they have a problem. They said that bullying does not happen but, if it did, staff would deal with it quickly and sensitively. The curriculum is used very well to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and what to do when emergencies arise. You ensure that almost all pupils learn to swim by the time they leave the school.

Systems and policies for safeguarding are clear and well managed. Senior leaders and the governing body undertake regular safeguarding checks so that they can be sure that arrangements are fit for purpose. Teaching staff, support staff and the governing body receive frequent, thorough and up-to-date training. They are knowledgeable, note any concerns they have and report these correctly. Leaders are aware of local issues and ensure that these guide the school's work to keep pupils safe. A good example of this is a recent assembly that gave parents an opportunity to find out how to help keep their children safe online.

You work closely with the relevant outside agencies and liaise with them promptly so that pupils receive the help and support they need. Safeguarding records are detailed and of good quality. Pre-employment checks on adults working at the school are rigorous and well documented.

Inspection findings

- Over recent years, pupils have left John Blow Primary School fully prepared for their secondary education. They have achieved well, with a good grounding in a wide range of subjects. They have excellent attitudes to learning and conduct themselves very well.
- In 2016, however, pupils' attainment in reading at the end of Year 6 dropped from its

previous high standard and progress slowed. You and the staff team acted quickly to identify the reasons for this and to consider how you should address the dip. You carefully selected new strategies for teaching reading and put these into place throughout the year. Staff received training and support from colleagues within the school. Pupils in all years now analyse high-quality texts in detail. They read a wider range of books and respond well to their 'challenges'. As a result, attainment at the end of Year 6 improved this year. It was well above the national average, with a large proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard. These pupils made much faster progress than the national average. Assessment information for other pupils shows an improving picture. You recognise, however, that not all teachers are applying the chosen strategies fully.

- You have also introduced a range of ways to promote pupils' enjoyment of reading. 'Top reads' encourage pupils to read widely and there are more books in the school library and classrooms. Pupils receive certificates for reading more challenging titles. Pupils are reading a range of authors. They write weekly updates in their reading log on what they have read and what they thought of it. This is helping them to develop their comprehension and analysis skills. Some pupils, however, are not reading regularly enough at home. Teachers are beginning to check more frequently on this so that they can overcome any gaps quickly.
- Since the last inspection, you have ensured that pupils make much faster progress in mathematics. Standards by the end of Year 6 are very high. One of your staff has trained to be a specialist teacher of mathematics. The teacher has provided high-quality support and training to colleagues. This has enabled them to improve their own practice. You have rightly identified that other teachers' subject knowledge and skills are not as strong as you would wish. As we visited lessons together, we saw that teachers sometimes did not fully deal with pupils' errors and misconceptions.
- Pupils in Year 2 reach broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress from their starting points on entry to the school in the Reception class. Assessment information from the past few years, however, indicates that some year groups made better progress than others. You are aware of these inconsistencies. You have removed these by recruiting well and ensuring that staffing is stable. You have also provided good-quality training and effective moderation of teachers' judgements. Teachers' assessments are accurate. They provide reliable information on how well pupils have learned and what they need to learn next.
- Leaders are committed to providing a broad, balanced and exciting curriculum. This is evident in their workbooks, in displays around the school and in my conversations with pupils. Subject leaders have set out clearly the skills that pupils should learn in all subjects in each year group. These 'skills ladders' are then used well to check what has been taught and how well pupils are achieving. Leaders have identified that teachers' assessments in subjects other than reading, writing, mathematics and science are not yet consistently accurate across classes. They have planned a programme of meetings with a group of local schools to discuss expectations for each year group in art, music and physical education and to moderate their judgements. They plan to repeat this process for the other subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use the recently introduced strategies to improve pupils' reading skills consistently well
- teachers deal with pupils' errors and misconceptions in mathematics more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Sanchez-Thompson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited all classes with you and the deputy headteacher to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We also checked pupils' progress in their workbooks and folders. We discussed the school's effectiveness and the actions taken to ensure the school's continued improvement.

I met with the leaders for English and key stage 1, and with five governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I talked with a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6 and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. I met with parents on the playground at the beginning of the school day.

I looked at a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plan. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I checked assessment information on how well pupils are achieving. I considered 50 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 31 free-text comments from parents. I also reviewed eight responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.