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Mrs Amy Futers
Headteacher
Dereham Church of England Infant & Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Futers

Short inspection of Dereham Church of England Infant & Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 previous inspection. There have been considerable changes in staffing since then. You stepped up from your role as deputy headteacher and became acting headteacher in September last year. You took up the role of headteacher seven weeks ago and, together with your assistant headteachers, have continued to make improvements in the quality of education pupils receive. You have built an impressive staff team who work together effectively. They appreciate the good-quality professional development they have received, including the opportunity to visit other schools. Staff say that this was particularly helpful in building their subject knowledge and confidence to teach mathematics. The outcome of this effective training was improved outcomes in mathematics in 2018. The newly qualified teacher who started at the school in September is thrilled with the quality of support she has received: 'I have been on courses for every curriculum subject and visited other schools. I feel really ready to teach.' The staff responses to the online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about your leadership of the school and several commented on how they have a good work-life balance.

You, the assistant headteachers and the governors have accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Your school improvement plan reflects the next steps identified in your self-evaluation. The bitesize improvement plans work well because you take one target from your improvement plan and work intensively on it for a limited time. This razor-sharp focus enables staff to concentrate on one aspect of improvement at a time. It results in rapid school improvement and positive outcomes for pupils. For example, your focus on improving the consistency

of phonics teaching from Nursery to Year 2 has ensured that all pupils learn to read and any special educational needs are rapidly identified. Your current focus on improving handwriting and presentation in books is ensuring that pupils learn how to form their letters accurately and neatly and maintain good-quality presentation in their written work. Parents and carers like this approach to school improvement because they know what you are working on. You give them effective support so that they can continue to help their children at home. One parent said: 'They are just really accommodating and willing to help you and talk you through everything. We understand and have a lot more confidence with how to support our child at home.' Another parent commented on the improvements in the teaching of reading: 'There's been a big push on reading with reading challenges in the holidays as well. In fact, my four-year-old reads better than my eight-year-old did when they were that age.'

Most pupils enjoy coming to school every day. One pupil said, 'There's nothing that could be better at this school. It's already a great school. It's fantastic!' Most pupils who responded to the online questionnaire were very positive about the school. A few felt that behaviour could be improved and highlighted bullying as an issue. However, all the pupils I spoke to during the inspection were pleased with how staff manage any concerns they have and deal with any poor behaviour rapidly and effectively. All say that they are confident to talk to an adult if they are worried about something.

Although you and the assistant headteachers have continued to drive forward school improvement and have addressed the issues from the previous inspection, you acknowledge that your leadership team is new, and more work is required to consolidate the improvements you have made. You are currently reviewing and revising your curriculum. This work is at an early stage of development. Your special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) provides strong and effective support to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), but currently does not have sufficient time in school to monitor and evaluate effectively the provision she has put in place.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors have ensured that safeguarding processes and procedures meet requirements. All staff receive effective training and are confident to complete concern forms appropriately. You keep very careful and detailed records when staff raise a concern about a pupil. You work effectively with outside agencies to ensure that all pupils are safe.

Attendance is improving, and you are successfully working with families to reduce persistent absence and ensure that pupils are in school on time every day.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was about the curriculum and how you and senior leaders are ensuring that pupils build a strong knowledge and understanding of all

curriculum areas to prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Since September last year, you and the staff have been reviewing and revising your curriculum. You have consulted pupils and created new curriculum themes that include pupils' interests. Subject leaders have ensured that national curriculum objectives for their subjects are included in each theme. In addition, they have decided on the key knowledge, vocabulary and skills pupils will learn in each theme, and the staff have mapped appropriate connections between subjects within each theme. Subject leaders are at the early stages of considering the underlying concepts they want pupils to understand for their subjects and how these concepts will be developed from Nursery to Year 2.

- My second line of enquiry was about how you and the governors use pupil premium grant to accelerate the progress of pupils eligible for this grant in reading and writing. You and the governors have targeted funding to ensure that pupils have effective support in class. In addition, you provide small-group and individual work to help pupils improve their reading skills. During the inspection, I scrutinised pupils' work in writing and read with a sample of pupils eligible for the additional funding. Pupils are making strong progress in writing from their starting points because of effective teaching and support. The additional reading time is helping pupils to consolidate their learning of phonics and improve their understanding of what they read.
- My third line of enquiry was about how you ensure the teaching of phonics is consistent and effective from the Nursery to Year 2. You and one of the assistant headteachers, who leads literacy, reviewed the teaching of phonics following the outcome of the 2018 phonics check for Year 1 pupils. The literacy leader observed the teaching of phonics in all classes and checked how pupils are grouped across the school. This review has resulted in more effective use of resources and carefully targeted small-group teaching by teachers and teaching assistants in Reception and key stage 1.
- Children receive a strong start to learning phonics in the Nursery, where teachers encourage and enable children to develop careful listening. For example, in one activity the teacher introduced a variety of objects, making sure that the children could say the name of each object. The teacher then split the name of the object into its sounds and each child was able to pick up an object in response to the sounds given by the teacher.
- Your strong whole-school focus on improving reading has encouraged pupils to read more at home. Parents are confident in helping their children learn to read due to the effective support you give them. When I read with those pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read, they were all able to use their phonic knowledge to sound out simple words. Reading books are well organised, so pupils can practise the sounds they are learning in class.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well you support pupils with SEND. The SENCo has put strong systems in place to identify and make provision for pupils with SEND. She carries out a detailed evaluation of each pupil's specific needs and puts programmes in place to meet these needs. If the programmes do not result in improvement, the SENCo seeks advice and help from a range of external experts. In addition, you have funded training in speech therapy for one of your

teaching assistants. Consequently, she can provide effective support to pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties.

- Although the SENCo provides effective support for teachers and training for teaching assistants, she does not have sufficient time in school to observe and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the support programmes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders include the underlying subject concepts pupils should understand in each of the new curriculum themes
- the SENCo receives sufficient time during the school week to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of support programmes for pupils with SEND.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the assistant headteachers, the SENCo, the governors, the staff, subject leaders for all curriculum areas, a representative from the local authority, pupils and parents. We observed learning and teaching in all classes, with a focus on the teaching of phonics and provision for pupils with SEND. Pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 read to me. I scrutinised a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I scrutinised pupils' writing in English and other subjects with the assistant headteachers. I scrutinised a range of safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupil files. I scrutinised responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire for parents, 25 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 35 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.