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Mrs Helen Coleman
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Dear Mrs Coleman

Short inspection of Northchapel Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 September 2016, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher, you know each and every one of the pupils in your care and passionately strive to constantly improve the quality of provision at Northchapel. You have secured excellent working relationships with staff, governors and parents and offer first-class leadership. You have ensured that improvements to the quality of teaching and learning, together with clear systems and structures, are in place so that the needs of all pupils are met. Pupils and parents are rightly proud of the school and all that it achieves.

Northchapel is a small, rural school that offers a nurturing and inclusive community atmosphere. Pupils are cheerful and confident, and display very positive attitudes towards learning, their school and each other. They apply themselves diligently to the tasks they are given and take pride in making their work the best it can be. From early years onwards, the habits of good learning are established and pupils are keen to excel.

Cohorts at the school are often very small, comprising fewer than 10 children. This means that there is often considerable variability in each year group and therefore it is difficult to make comparisons with national averages. Yet, historical progress information over time, together with current progress information relating to all year groups within the school, indicates a significantly improving picture in reading and writing skills and improvements in mathematics compared with age-related expectations. Leaders and governors are aware that more could still be done to embed further

opportunities for investigative and problem-solving work in mathematics. Pupils are well known as individuals by staff and their peers and the school takes great care to support the academic and pastoral development of them all. The school offers a broad curriculum, together with trips and visits which provide opportunities to learn about different faiths and celebrate different cultures. Parents are effusive in their praise for staff, who willingly offer extra time to enrich and extend learning by offering a wide range of activities and clubs, including high-quality Forest School learning experiences, art, sports, swimming, a talented choir and the popular Lego club. Pupils value opportunities to take on extra responsibility by becoming prefects, acting as sports leaders or buddies to younger pupils or being on the school council. Supporting pupils' personal development is clearly a strength of the school.

You provide governors with an accurate understanding of the school and use precise tracking and assessment information to identify strengths and areas for development. Your school improvement planning is concise, has clear targets and is appropriately focused. Consequently, standards are improving and all groups of current pupils are making strong progress.

You have ensured that the school has responded well to the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. Working in partnership with a variety of other schools, you have shared and developed new initiatives and teaching approaches. As a result, the quality of teaching and outcomes has improved and staff morale is high.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors appropriately place a strong emphasis on pupils' safety and welfare. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a caring culture of vigilance and accurate and detailed records are kept. Appropriate checks are made on all adults who work with pupils. Staff receive regular and relevant training on safeguarding, with an appropriate focus on maintaining awareness of radicalisation and e-safety. Regular communication between key staff and other agencies ensures timely and effective support for pupils of concern and reviews of the impact of any actions taken.

Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. You routinely monitor absence rates and have worked closely with external agencies and families to support improvements. In a school where 'everybody knows everybody', the children mix and socialise across year groups and so bullying and discrimination are extremely rare. Pupils and parents confirm that this is a very caring school, and that the children feel safe and well looked after here. They know whom to go to should they have any concerns and they trust them to respond appropriately.

Inspection findings

- You work effectively to support and challenge the quality of teaching and learning across the whole school. You are outward looking, ensuring that the school works well with a range of other local schools in the Rother Valley network and further afield. You are able to access ideas and resources and share good practice.
- Governors are an enthusiastic and effective team who regularly visit the school and know it well. They have recently re-organised their committee structure to offer more focused support through specific sub-committees. While the level of organisation has improved, governors are aware that there is scope to improve their focus and so offer more robust levels of challenge and support to specific areas of underperformance.
- Leaders and governors have taken effective steps to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching seen during this inspection, the school's evidence about pupils' strong progress and the work in pupils' books all confirm that the majority of teaching at Northchapel is securely good or better. There is convincing evidence of improved attainment of the current cohorts due to teachers matching learning closely to the range of abilities in each class. Pupils are well aware of the next steps in their learning. Reading skills across the school are particularly high and writing and mathematical skills are broadly in line with national expectations and improving.
- Small cohorts at the school make comparison of individual year groups with national averages difficult. Over time, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of early years is broadly in line with the national average. The standard of literacy has clearly improved over recent years; in 2016, all pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics check (letters and the sounds they represent), as did all those who re-took the check in Year 2. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 is broadly average, with achievement in reading being particularly high.
- In the past, standards by the end of Year 6 have been broadly in line with national expectations. In 2016, published information shows that the proportion of this small cohort of Year 6 pupils who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was much lower than national averages. Leaders' detailed records evidence the exceptional circumstances faced by some of these pupils and the positive impact of various interventions which supported pupils to make progress. This fall in achievement in 2016 for Year 6 pupils does not represent a decline in standards over time. The school's accurate progress information and the achievement in pupils' books clearly demonstrate that current pupils are making strong progress in both key stages.

- Leaders of literacy and mathematics work well with teachers to support their professional development and improve practice across the school. As a result, the standard pupils achieve in phonics, reading and writing has significantly improved. Although standards in mathematics have improved, leaders are aware that more can be done. A good start has been made. Changes to the school's approach are successfully motivating pupils and promoting both deeper understanding and secure reasoning skills.
- Teachers have high expectations and use their good subject and assessment knowledge to design stimulating lessons. They focus clearly on pupils' intended learning and give precise feedback to pupils, who use this to improve their work. Teachers use questioning and discussion effectively to probe and deepen pupils' understanding. For example, in the Years 3 and 4 class, the teacher's skilful questioning and feedback promoted careful analysis and encouraged pupils to apply their literacy skills to produce and refine balanced arguments about life in the Stone Age.
- Early years teachers from the school have worked collaboratively with teachers from other local schools to develop a 'transition toolkit'. This range of resources and ideas supports parents, children and staff during the transition from pre-school into Reception and encourages greater independence. As a result, Reception Year children demonstrate the skills and confidence to settle into routines very quickly and they make good progress.
- The transition from Reception into Year 1 is similarly well managed and consistent phonics teaching ensures that pupils continue to make strong progress. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils, and they set them challenging work. As a result, pupils in Year 1 confidently apply their phonics skills to sound out letters to help them read. Teachers and teaching assistants use a range of appropriate techniques to gently correct pupils' responses, supporting and challenging pupils to read more complex words and passages.
- The building housing the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 and 2 classes was recently refurbished and the classrooms provide a rich and stimulating learning environment. During this building work, heavy machinery caused some damage to the external learning environment. Staff make sure that routine risk assessments ensure the safety of the pupils, enabling some activities to resume in this area. Together with governors, you have drawn up detailed plans for the refurbishment of the external learning environment and are currently seeking funding to complete this work.

- You have improved the level of challenge for the most able pupils by raising standards of literacy and thinking skills across the curriculum. For example, in upper key stage 2, pupils were actively engaged in guided reading sessions evaluating how the author of 'The Jungle Book' created tension and depth in his characters. During the day, the same group was also engaged in conducting an ongoing science experiment to investigate the changing length of shadows during the day. The pupils demonstrated high levels of understanding and were able to apply subject-specific vocabulary to offer explanations of abstract concepts with confidence.
- The small numbers of disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils, together with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are offered bespoke support that is well matched to their particular needs, and their progress and welfare are routinely reviewed. Teaching assistants know the pupils well and are very effective at supporting these and other pupils in class, so that all can participate fully in lessons. As a result, all pupils are making strong progress over time.
- The local authority is supportive of the school. Following recent restructuring, it now has an increased capacity to offer strategic support to leaders and governors as well as to facilitate subject-specific support. The authority is aware of the progress that the school has made in the past by working with local partner schools. The local authority is keen to work more closely with the school to secure future improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors continue to improve the focus of their committees and work in partnership with the local authority and other providers to increase the level of support and challenge for school leaders
- teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in mathematics, become as consistently challenging for all pupils as the best examples currently in the school
- the external learning environment in early years is improved to provide a rich level of challenge and engagement and so promote outstanding progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this visit, I looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision including: safeguarding arrangements; the effectiveness of leadership; the achievement of pupils in key stage 2; boys' progress in the early years; and how effectively the school meets the needs of specific groups, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. I met with you, subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator, the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I visited all of the classes jointly with you to look at teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' work in their exercise books, including work done this year and last. I had a meeting with a small group of pupils from the school council and spoke to several pupils informally at lunchtime. I took into account 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including pupils' progress information and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.