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Mr Alex Griffiths
Headteacher
Brooke Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Griffiths

Short inspection of Brooke Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2018, 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has undergone a period of instability at headship level over the past 18 months, with a number of temporary headteachers. However, with good support from the local authority and the strong leadership that governors have provided, standards of education have not been allowed to slip. Indeed, outcomes have improved, especially at the end of early years and in phonics, where results are above national averages. While you have only just taken up post as substantive headteacher and the day of the inspection was only your seventh day in school, you have been working closely with governors, staff, the local authority and the interim headteacher since your appointment in March 2018. You and the most recent interim headteacher, who has been overseeing the school's work over the Summer term, have worked closely together to steer the school in the right direction and ensure that your high expectations are well embedded across the school.

The school provides a positive and warm atmosphere within which pupils thrive. Parents are very positive about the school and pleased as much with the care and support their children receive as with the quality of education it provides. Their written responses indicate that you have already made a very good impression and parents are delighted to see you at the gate being 'very welcoming' and 'approachable'.

Pupils are happy and safe at school. They enjoy all it has to offer. In lessons, pupils focus exceptionally well on their work, and when opportunities arise to work together, they collaborate and support one another's learning well. They say that they like working in groups, provided they are working with the right person, and would like more opportunities for group work and sharing ideas in lessons. You are very aware of this and have already identified engagement with pupils and opportunities for them to debate ideas, share views and opinions as an area for development. This is both in lessons and in relation to wider participation in decision-making across the school.

While the school has continued to maintain its overall performance since its previous inspection, because of the lack of a substantive headteacher for an extended period of time, progress with some of the issues identified in the previous report has been slower. Pupils' writing needs further development and the level of challenge for the most able pupils remains a little inconsistent. However, you and your senior leaders, including the most recent interim headteacher, who is continuing to work with you, are very clear about the areas that need to further development. Your assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses is very accurate. Improvement plans are, therefore, focused on the right areas and plot a clear course of action to address the issues you and other leaders have identified.

Governors also have a strong understanding of how good the school is and are ambitious for it to become even better. Governors have been actively involved in the school's work and, in the absence of a substantive headteacher, have provided strong visibility to parents and staff to ensure a consistent leadership presence. Staff are proud to work at Brooke and feel well supported.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are comprehensive and fit for purpose. Staff are well trained and vigilant, hence any concerns about a pupil's well-being are picked up quickly and followed through. The school focuses well on keeping absences to a minimum and works closely with families to address any barriers to regular attendance. Consequently, very few pupils are persistently absent.

The school is thorough in completing all pre-employment checks to ensure that all adults in the school are safe to work with children. These checks are also carried out for governors and volunteers. Leaders and governors make sure that all checks are up to date.

Pupils are well looked after and they and their parents say that they are safe at school. Pupils are also confident to approach an adult if they have any worries or concerns. In discussion, pupils said that staff are good at sorting out any problems, including helping them to make up with friends if they fall out with one another.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I looked at how well leaders are developing pupils' skills in writing in key stage 2, especially the skills of middle-ability pupils, as comparatively few of them achieve a high standard of writing. In addition, improving writing was an area for development following the school's previous inspection. While pupils are taught a wide range of English language skills and grammar effectively, they are not given regular enough opportunities to produce longer pieces of work where they can apply these skills. This is especially so in subjects across the curriculum, though sometimes even in English pupils are not practising writing enough. Consequently, not enough pupils are developing their writing to a greater depth, especially middle-ability pupils.
- You and your leadership team have already agreed that improving the quality of pupils' writing is a priority for development. I did see some examples of high-quality writing, particularly from the most able pupils. In addition, I saw some good examples of report-writing in science. Overall, though, pupils are not using other subjects to develop a varied enough range of writing.
- Another focus for the inspection included the extent to which teachers are extending and stretching the most able pupils to enable them to deepen their learning, particularly in mathematics in key stage 2 and in their work in the early years. The end of key stage 2 test results indicate that standards of attainment are high. Nonetheless, there is some scope for the most able pupils to make even more progress, especially in mathematics. In the early years, very few children seem to exceed the early learning goals by the end of Reception. Challenging the most able pupils more consistently was also an area for improvement in the last inspection report.
- We visited classrooms together and saw examples of good questioning by teachers which helped to extend pupils' understanding, including for the most able. We also saw pupils using practical equipment in mathematics which helped them to unpick more complicated and challenging ideas. The school is focusing well on giving pupils regular opportunities to work on problem-solving and investigative mathematics. This is helping to challenge the most able pupils well. In one class, for example, some of the most able pupils investigating patterns in a sequence of shapes had worked out simple equations to predict the next shape in the sequence. However, in this and other classes, you also agreed that some able pupils needed to be moved on more quickly or extended further in thinking their ideas through. It was also clear that a number of middle-attaining pupils were finding the work difficult and needed more support to develop their depth of understanding. With the right support, many of these pupils are capable of achieving higher standards of work.
- Children in the early years are challenged and extended very skilfully. The activities they are provided with are practical and structured around a common theme which engages children's interests and enthusiasm. Children become quickly absorbed in their work. The level and quality of discussion between them and with adults is of a high standard. We were particularly impressed with two girls who were balancing a set of scales, in the shape of a monkey, using banana-shaped weights. They were meticulous in counting up the number of

bananas needed to balance the scales. One of the two girls counted while the second noted down the numbers, checking and cross-checking the numbers and confirming what had been written down as if they were seasoned accountants.

- I saw high-quality written work in the early years, with the most able children already beginning to use capital letters and full stops. It was clear from your own evaluations and the observations we made that adults question children very effectively in Reception to help them to move their learning on. Their interactions with children are very well judged. Adults show children how to role play and push their creativity and imagination as far as possible.
- My final focus for inspection included looking at the how well teachers assess pupils' standards of attainment at the end of early years and key stage 1. This is because there sometimes seems to be a big jump in results between the end of early years and key stage 1. It was clear from examining books and assessment data that pupils move forward well in their learning across key stage 1. Nonetheless, the school has been working on developing assessment this year. Staff have had good opportunities to work together to check their assessments with one another and with teachers from other local schools. Consequently, assessments of children's and pupils' work are more accurate in identifying how well pupils are achieving. This is confirmed by external checking of teachers' assessments at the end of early years and key stage 1.
- The school has also been working on improving the tracking of progress between the end of early years and key stage 1 given that the frameworks for the curriculum and assessment are different across these two phases. This will help to ensure continued progress across key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are given regular enough opportunities to apply the skills that they are learning in English to develop their writing in other subjects, and to practise their writing more consistently in English
- teachers challenge the most able pupils enough in mathematics, especially in reasoning and investigative work, and support those who find the work more difficult
- there are good opportunities for pupils to have more of a voice in decision-making across the school, and in discussing and sharing their ideas in lessons.

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

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the interim headteacher who has been leading the school this term and is now working with you, a senior teacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. You and I visited classrooms together and looked at pupils' work in their books. I also observed an assembly and pupils in the dining hall at lunchtime. As part of the inspection, I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. These included safeguarding records, and records of attendance and behaviour. I took account of the Ofsted online questionnaire responses from 35 parents, as well as 28 written responses from parents. In addition, I considered 12 responses from staff and 55 responses from pupils to Ofsted surveys online.