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Mr Colin Butler
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Butler

Short inspection of Tipton St John Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since the previous inspection, the school has become part of the Otter Valley Federation, a federation with Feniton CE Primary School. This is proving to be a mutually beneficial partnership where your staff have been able to share expertise, receive training and moderate pupils' work. Governors have also established the Foundation Stage Unit (FSU) to ensure the youngest children receive high-quality teaching.

At the previous inspection, the school's leaders were asked to improve the outcomes for children in the early years. You have appointed an experienced early years teacher and have made good use of colleagues in your partner school to raise standards. Staff are now planning learning activities that are well matched to children's needs, so that they make strong progress.

You have also ensured that pupils' writing and their handwriting in key stage 1 have improved. You recognise there is further work to do on this. I agree, however, that the increasing length and complexity seen in pupils' writing are strong. They are let down by their inaccurate use of punctuation and spelling errors.

Overall, pupils are now attempting work which is better matched to their needs. The strong outcomes pupils reach at the end of key stage 1, the progress they make in reading by the end of key stage 2 and their strong performance in phonics at the end of Year 1 show the effect of this.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the relevant checks are carried out when appointing staff and volunteers. Staff are aware of the risks that pupils may face and have had training in various aspects of safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation and the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Staff have built on this training in their lessons. Pupils are able to explain how they stay safe on social media and when using the internet, and are confident in engaging in debate with people who may have different, including extreme, views. Consequently, pupils are safe.

There have been occasions where systems have failed. You, along with staff and governors, have reflected on these and made changes to policies and procedures to reduce the risks going forward.

The lower site (where the early years children and key stage 1 pupils are taught) is particularly vulnerable to flooding. The risk assessments that are in place are effective and evacuation procedures are tried and tested. These can cause considerable disruption, but good planning minimises the impact that regular flooding can have.

Inspection findings

- Governors have invested heavily in staff training and moderation to improve the quality of pupils' writing. This is bearing fruit. Pupils show positive attitudes towards their writing, and standards are rising. Children in the early years use their phonic knowledge well in their writing. The nursery-age children in the FSU can form letters and recognise the sounds they make. In all years, there is evidence that pupils are making good progress from their varying starting points. However, while pupils write with flair, at increasingly greater length and in a wide range of styles, they are not achieving the highest levels, as their grammar, punctuation and spelling are not good enough. Teachers' feedback does not consistently identify misuse of punctuation or grammatical errors, and insufficient attention is paid to pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar in key stage 2. Consequently, too few are writing at greater depth.
- Pupils who are the most able are identified and known to staff. They read sophisticated texts well and show a deep understanding of what they have read. While they reach the standard expected for their age in writing and mathematics, only a few of the most able pupils are working at greater depth by the end of key stage 2 in writing and mathematics. In key stage 1, pupils are making progress in line with their peers but teachers do not routinely give sufficient attention to the most able pupils when planning activities which allow them to reach the higher standards. The most able children in the early years make good progress and often show they have securely reached a good level of development at an early stage of their time in the FSU.
- Teachers plan a good range of activities in subjects such as science, history and art. Pupils develop good knowledge about different aspects of the key periods in history. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 use their creative skills to

demonstrate their knowledge through the composition of a rap to explain the daily life of an Anglo-Saxon family. Pupils told me that they find their work interesting and are keen to learn more. Some of their geographic skills are not as well developed, and their understanding is not as strong as their knowledge.

- Children in the FSU make strong progress. From their varying starting points, all children currently in Reception are on track to reach a good level of development by the end of the summer term. Staff in the FSU plan activities for children with particular care to ensure that they are secure in each area of the curriculum. As a result of this strong teaching and the stimulating environment, the nursery-age children are working at high levels and are already able to identify letters and their associated sounds. The children are enthusiastic learners, show kindness to one another and are keen to talk to visitors. They are acutely aware of how to keep themselves safe, such as the risk of being burned when cooking or scalding from a boiling kettle.
- The transition arrangements you have put in place with the local secondary school are strong, and pupils in Years 5 and 6 told me they feel well prepared for moving on. Through the work your colleagues plan, pupils are clear about the expectations and different ways they will be expected to work.
- Pupils' attendance is good. In each year since the previous inspection, attendance has been better than the national average. Persistent absence levels have been well below the national average for many years. This year is no different. You have set high expectations of pupils' attendance and punctuality and make appropriate use of the education welfare officer when necessary to ensure that attendance remains high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' writing continues to improve, particularly in their spelling and the accurate use of punctuation and grammar
- teachers routinely plan opportunities for the most able pupils to attempt work which will challenge them fully.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I observed learning in classrooms and was accompanied by the head of school in most cases. We looked at a large number of pupils' books. I heard a number of pupils of differing abilities read. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils to talk about their experience of school. Meetings were held with senior leaders, the designated leader for safeguarding and two governors. I also spoke with an officer of the local authority.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation and development plan, risk assessments and safeguarding records. I considered the views of 22 parents who responded to Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires by 65 pupils and 12 members of staff.

This short inspection focused on:

- the progress pupils make in writing
- the level of challenge for the most able pupils
- the standards achieved in subjects other than English and mathematics
- the quality of education in the early years
- pupils' safety.