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Miss Naomi de Chastelain
Headteacher
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Dear Miss de Chastelain

Short inspection of Hemington Primary School.

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 your school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. It is well regarded in the local community, as described by one parent, as 'a very special school where each child is valued'.

Since your appointment as headteacher, you and the governing body quickly recognised that some pupils were not doing as well as they could. You have made effective use of external support to make improvements to teaching and learning. These improvements can be clearly seen for pupils currently in all year groups. The opportunity for the youngest children to start school at age two is accelerating the progress made in the early years.

Your staff and governors are fully committed to ensuring that the school meets its aim of providing 'a good start for all'. In this very small school, you and your dedicated team juggle many different roles to ensure that every child receives a personalised approach to their education. This is very much appreciated by the parents, who recognise that the school is like 'an extended family that promotes a love of learning, self-confidence and care for others'.

Since the previous inspection, pupils have continued to achieve well. You know that reading standards are much better than those in writing and mathematics. You have raised the expectations of both staff and pupils by working with other local small schools and using the expertise of a local leader in education (LLE). However, you recognise that there is still some way to go in raising pupils' aspirations. This is

especially so with those pupils who have had minimal writing experiences before joining your school and lack the skills and aptitude to work out problems for themselves. Pupils' presentation skills were noted as a weakness at the time of the previous inspection. You and your teaching staff know that this must remain a key focus for improvement.

The behaviour of the pupils remains a strength of the school, particularly those pupils who have been with you since the Reception Year. Pupils are friendly and generally polite and courteous. Your small team has successfully implemented the changes to the primary curriculum in the two classes and maintained a rich and varied range of activities for the pupils.

You and your governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this very small school and are not complacent about the need for further improvement. Areas that require action are clearly reflected in the development plan and improvements are rigorously monitored by the governors.

Safeguarding is effective.

Although you enjoy close relationships with your families and there is a very relaxed and friendly feel to the school, the safeguarding of pupils is never compromised.

All adults who work in the school know to inform you, as the designated safeguarding lead, if they have the slightest worry or concern about any of the pupils. Parents know that they must contact the school if their child is unwell and will not be attending. Over the past two years, there has been a high proportion of pupils who have not been able to attend school regularly. You have kept in close contact with their families and, where necessary, worked with external agencies to support them. Although overall attendance rates continue to be affected by a few pupils who are educated at home because of ill-health or taught part-time elsewhere, you keep in very close contact with the families.

You, your staff and governors are fully aware of all the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding. These are regularly reviewed and updated. You and your lead safeguarding governor have received the appropriate training to ensure that you recruit and appoint staff members who have been through rigorous checks. Your staff and governors also have a clear understanding of the need to protect pupils from any risk of radicalisation or extremism.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and know that the school would deal with any problems between classmates that might arise. They understand the dangers of using the internet. All the parents who responded to the online inspection survey, Parent View, agreed that their children are well looked after by the school. One parent emphasised that pupils 'feel secure and nurtured'.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection you have been promoted from the class teacher for Reception and key stage 1 to the headteacher of the school. There have been a number of staff changes. You and the governors have employed a part-time teacher to provide extra challenge for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and provided additional support for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics was not good enough in 2014 and 2015. You recognised these weaknesses and conducted useful external reviews that led to high-quality support for the department. As a result, there was significant improvement in 2016. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils improved markedly when compared with others who are not disadvantaged nationally. These improvements can also be seen clearly for pupils currently in the school and are being sustained in all year groups.
- When comparing information from your school with national figures, because of the small number of pupils involved caution needs to be exercised. Of the 42 pupils who currently attend the school, one third of them have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Just under half are eligible for pupil premium, additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils.
- The vast majority of the children who start in your Reception class have limited personal, social and emotional skills and their ability to speak and listen is underdeveloped. Year groups are extremely small and, at times, do not have any children in them. This means that you are able to accept pupils into your school who may have been unhappy elsewhere. You also welcome pupils who have previously been educated at home and are coming towards the end of their primary education.
- Given the range and diversity of your year groups, teachers plan well for the differing needs of every pupil. A particular strength is the way that they work across the key stages to adapt the learning to meet the needs of pupils.
- Reception children work successfully alongside their Year 1 and 2 classmates. Good use is made of the outdoor learning areas to provide them with specific opportunities to develop their physical skills. For example, children enjoy the challenges of the climbing equipment and the school forest area. Their counting skills are also developed well when they work on number games outside. Although not all children reach the expected standard in all the areas of learning in the early years curriculum, they make steady progress from low starting points.
- Results from the phonics checks at the end of Year 1 vary. For example, in 2014, results were well below national expectations. Nevertheless, pupils had made good progress in their reading skills from very low starting points and continued to do so in Years 2 and 3. This was clearly demonstrated when I heard a group of these pupils read fluently and confidently to me during the inspection.

- You are justifiably proud of pupils' reading standards and explain that this is the result of a long-established approach to the teaching of phonics that you have cultivated. Pupils who have been educated at home also join you with good reading standards. All pupils read widely and enjoy both fiction and non-fiction books. This is reflected year on year in the Year 6 reading test results.
- Most pupils in the 2016 Year 2 cohort, including those eligible for the pupil premium, reached the expected standard in their national tests for reading, writing and mathematics. Given that only a small proportion of these pupils achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception, this demonstrates good progress. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also made good progress but just missed out on attaining the expected standard.
- Although pupils achieve well in the Year 6 national tests from their starting points, results over the past few years highlight the need to accelerate the school's drive to improve the standards in writing and mathematics. This is one of the main reasons why you have reorganised your teaching staff so that an additional teacher is able to provide further challenge for pupils in Years 5 and 6.
- You and your teachers have started to see an improvement in pupils' writing. They talk much more about what they are going to write before they put pen to paper. Writing tasks have also been introduced as an integral part of topic work. This is helping pupils to make more use of their grammar, punctuation, spelling and creative skills to deepen their knowledge when learning. For example, when learning about the ancient Greek civilisation, pupils were encouraged to use descriptive language to explain what a historian would deduce from a range of artefacts from that time in history. However, the presentation of their writing remains poor.
- New mathematics challenges, such as a rapid recall of times tables and daily sessions to add pairs of numbers, are having a positive impact on improvements to pupils' mental recall of numbers. Teaching assistants provide extra sessions to support those pupils who find mathematical concepts difficult.
- You and your teaching staff are aware that pupils do not apply themselves as well as they could to tackling problems and solving them on their own. The strong partnerships you are developing with other small schools have started to provide your pupils with opportunities to work with other pupils of a similar age. In particular, it is developing a more competitive edge to your pupils, particularly the most able. This is helping them gain more confidence and raise their expectations of what they are capable of achieving.
- Given the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the range of complex needs, you and your team support them well. The specific characteristics of the school enable these pupils to receive personalised help. You work closely with specialists and communicate with pupils' parents regularly. This ensures that the pupils are happy and achieve as well as they can from their starting points.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional teaching support and support the outdoor forest work which is used to help the pupils develop their language and social skills and gain more confidence.

- Although pupils are generally attentive in lessons, they have a tendency to be over-reliant on adult support. You are fully aware that the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, lack the confidence to extend and apply themselves.
- The weekly assemblies based around British values have enabled the pupils to demonstrate a good awareness of what is in the national press on a daily basis. They have a secure knowledge of the democratic process in Britain and are familiar with the roles of significant politicians such as the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and make regular visits to the classes. They make good use of the detailed information that you send them. Their roles and responsibilities are clear and their professional expertise is used to both support and challenge you.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- links with other small schools are developed further so that pupils, particularly the older ones, gain a more realistic understanding of what they are expected to achieve by the time they move on to secondary school
- teachers plan more activities that encourage pupils to work on their own and challenge themselves to think deeply to solve a problem
- action is taken to improve the quality of pupils' handwriting.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the lines of enquiry I had chosen to explore. This included why pupils' absence was so high in 2015, why achievement at the end of Year 6 over the past few years was so low, and the quality of support given to those individuals who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. We discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about the progress pupils were making, attendance rates and improvements since the previous inspection. I also held discussions with the other two teachers and three governors. We visited the two classes together and looked at some of the current pupils' books. We also looked at the outgoing Year 6 books. I heard three pupils from Year 4 read. I met with five Year 6 pupils and talked to them about school life. I looked at the survey results from 'Parent View' and considered the comments that had been submitted.