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Miss Debra McGrail
Headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School
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Dear Miss McGrail

Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 September 2015 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have made a real difference since arriving at the school, wasting no time in establishing a concrete vision to make the school outstanding as quickly as possible. You have revitalised the highly capable staff, who are now motivated to match your high expectations to achieve this ambition. You have reinvigorated communication and relationships with parents, who recognise the significant contribution you make to the school.

This is a school where every child's progress and personal development really matter. You and your senior leaders track pupils' achievement diligently and closely, making sure that any extra help that pupils need to catch up is prompt and effective. As a result, pupils currently at the school make good progress. Disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive focused attention and carefully tailored support, both in and out of lessons. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They have a very strong understanding of the school's core values of perseverance, respect, friendship and thoughtfulness, which they put into practice in lessons and around the school. Pupils enjoy school, take great pride in their appearance and work, and want to do well.

At the time of your last inspection, the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school, including pupils' excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. They also identified a need to improve pupils' progress in reading and writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, raise pupils'

attendance and sharpen leaders' checks on teaching. Leaders have addressed all of these effectively so that:

- children's progress in reading and writing in Reception and Years 1 and 2 has accelerated
- pupils' attendance has risen steadily and is now above average
- you and other leaders check the quality of teaching regularly and accurately, providing precise and useful advice for teachers about what to do to further improve pupils' achievement.

You, your leadership team and governors are not complacent, however. You have identified the correct key priorities for further improvement and are taking the right actions to address them. You know that pupils, especially the most able, will only make really rapid progress in lessons if they are stretched and challenged more. While some effective support has been put in place for a minority of disadvantaged pupils who attend school less regularly, you know that this work needs to expand. Pupils' achievement at the end of Reception and Year 1 has risen markedly over the last three years so it is at or above national averages, but you recognise that it needs to rise further. Although governors have played an important role in checking leaders' actions to make improvements, their role in evaluating the impact on pupils' outcomes is not clear enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety is of paramount importance to everyone at the school. Pupils feel safe and parents are highly satisfied with how the school cares for their children. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Parents are involved in this too: for example, on the day of this inspection, parents were invited to an e-safety workshop in the early evening led by a local police officer. Children behave sensibly around the school. They are supervised well during break and lunchtimes, when they play happily, often energetically but safely.

Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding. Pupils' safety is always discussed at weekly staff meetings and any necessary actions are taken without delay. All governors and staff have recently had training about keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The school works effectively with external agencies in the very small number of situations when this is necessary. Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The school recently commissioned the local authority to conduct a health and safety audit, which identified only minor issues to be rectified.

Inspection findings

- Since your arrival in April 2015, you have swiftly established a culture of high expectations. Everything you, other leaders and teachers do is focused on improving pupils' outcomes and personal development. You have firmly established the necessary impetus and fresh determination to improve the school so that it becomes outstanding.
- You have galvanised the staff and governors, who now have renewed vigour. Building on leaders' good work to successfully address the areas from the last inspection, you have quickly got to grips with what the school needs to do now. Working with other leaders and governors, you have identified the right priorities and have the correct actions in place to achieve them. Your evaluation of the school's current effectiveness is accurate.
- You are on the playground every morning to greet parents and pupils. Parents recognise the difference you are making and welcome the regular communications from the school, your accessibility and the way that any queries or questions they might have are dealt with quickly and effectively. Parents rate the school highly.
- Leaders' checks on teaching and other aspects of the school's work are very thorough. Teachers receive detailed and useful advice from leaders about what they need to do to improve, which is always focused on accelerating pupils' progress.
- The school's assessment information is accurate and detailed. Every pupil's progress is tracked, enabling leaders to regularly hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement.
- Governors have rightly reorganised the way they work, resulting in further rigour in their challenge and support for leaders. Although they monitor the progress of improvements closely, their role in evaluating the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes is not clear enough.
- Leaders have refined how they provide extra support for the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Additional help is carefully tailored to pupils' individual needs. As a result, these pupils' progress is accelerating.
- Most pupils attend school very regularly. A small minority of pupils, many of whom are disadvantaged pupils, attend less regularly. Leaders have instigated a number of actions to address this, including employing a family support worker. The early signs are that these strategies are working and warrant further expansion.
- The majority of pupils make good progress across subjects in all year groups. There is no evidence that the dip in pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 is symptomatic of a decline. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen at the end of Key Stage 1.
- While the proportions of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception Year, and pupils reaching the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2015, are close to or above national averages, current pupils are on course to achieve more highly. Standards in these areas have risen rapidly over the last three years.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and generally challenge pupils well in lessons. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who need it. Teachers respond well to the advice you and other leaders give them. Most importantly, they are working hard to stretch pupils more, including the most able, so that they make really rapid progress over time.
- Pupils take great care over their work because teachers expect them to. Consequently, the standard of presentation in pupils' work is very high. Teachers' marking helps pupils improve their work. All pupils have appropriate individual targets, based on teachers' good knowledge of every pupil.
- Pupils are avid and frequent readers. They read regularly and enthusiastically for pleasure and parents are given useful guidance about how to help support their children's reading at home.
- Pupils take pride in their appearance and their school. They dress very smartly, do not drop litter and play a full and active part in the life of the school. They are invariably very happy at school and want to succeed. Standards of behaviour are extremely high and incidents of poor behaviour are incredibly rare. Pupils show high levels of respect and care for each other.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- governors clarify their roles in measuring the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' achievement
- teachers stretch pupils further in lessons, including the most able, so that they make rapid and substantial progress over time
- the attendance of a small number of disadvantaged pupils continues to rise so that it matches that of other pupils
- pupils' achievement at the end of Reception Year and in the Year 1 phonics screening check continues to improve.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Haynes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, teachers, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of Wokingham local authority. I also spoke to a representative of the Diocese of Oxford on the telephone. We visited sections of six lessons and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work. I took account of 19 responses to the staff survey and 32 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunchtime and around the school. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.