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23 March 2016

Mrs Lorna Pigram  
Headteacher  
St Nicholas' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Rawreth  
Priory Chase  
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Essex  
SS6 9NE

Dear Mrs Pigram

### **Short inspection of St Nicholas' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Rawreth**

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 November 2010.

#### **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 created a calm and harmonious school where pupils behave well and are making good progress. The environment is bright and attractive. Although the building is now some years old, it still has the look and feel of a new school because it is so well kept. The environment is enhanced further by the wide range of interesting displays in classrooms and in corridors.

The school has grown since the last inspection and now admits up to 20 pupils to each year group. The school is popular in the local area and the number of pupils on roll is continuing to rise. The school entered into a partnership arrangement with Canewdon Endowed Church of England Primary School in 2013 and this relationship was formalised as a hard federation just over a year ago. You and your deputy lead both schools as executive headteacher and executive deputy headteacher. You have ensured that the good leadership of St Nicholas' evident at the time of the last inspection has been maintained and built on during this period.

The two schools now share a single governing body, formed when the federation was formalised. The effectiveness of governance is developing well. Governors have looked carefully at any areas of weakness as a newly established group and have written a plan to address them which shows their determination to improve. Governors use the support and guidance provided by local authority advisers very

well to enable them to hold you and the school's other leaders to account. This support has already enabled them to develop their ability to ask challenging questions about the information they are given and so establish exactly how well the school is doing.

The pupils who attend St Nicholas' love their school. Members of the school council struggled to think of anything that they would change about it. They appreciate and value the wealth of rewards the school offers them for doing their best. Pupils say the good support they get helps them to learn. They described the range of trips they go on and how much these add to their school experience. Pupils feel that they are listened to and one pupil commented that 'we all have our own say' because they are given the opportunity to vote on issues regularly.

You have created a culture where everyone is valued. Pupils show extremely good attitudes to equality and speak with maturity about how it is wrong to judge other people on the strength of their physical characteristics or beliefs. During a discussion about racism, for example, when asked what they would do if they saw any another pupils being teased, one pupil quickly asserted 'I'd stand up for them'. This reflects the strong culture of tolerance, respect and equality that you and the school's other leaders have created.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's single central record is well maintained and meets statutory requirements. Robust arrangements are in place to ensure the safer recruitment of staff and it is clear that you place an appropriately high emphasis on this aspect of school leadership. You ensure that all visitors are checked thoroughly before they are allowed access to the school site. A detailed leaflet provides visitors with a range of information including what to do if they are concerned about a child.

Pupils feel safe at school and all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that they feel that their children are safe at school. Pupils say that bullying is rare at St Nicholas' but they have confidence in staff to help them if a problem should ever arise. Pupils attend school regularly and on time; attendance rates are currently above the national average.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have focused well on raising the quality of teaching in the school and improvements are clearly evident. School leaders monitor teaching thoroughly by undertaking regular observations of lessons, looking at pupils' work and carrying out 'learning walks'. Appropriate support is put in place to help staff to develop, meeting any identified needs. You use the weekly staff meetings as 'impact meetings', focused on improving specific aspects of the school's work. As a result, teachers have increased their effectiveness and there are some examples of particularly effective teaching over time. In Year 5/6, for example, expectations are high, pupils show very good attitudes to learning and the work in pupils' exercise books is of a

particularly good quality. In some cases, teaching focuses too much on completion of tasks and not enough on what it is that pupils should learn; this limits the progress pupils make.

- You took decisive action to tackle the weaknesses in mathematics evident in the 2015 Key Stage 2 results. You arranged for a local authority adviser to undertake a review of mathematics in order to diagnose the specific issues preventing pupils from making better progress. As a result, you took a range of actions to improve teaching and learning in mathematics: you improved the mathematics curriculum by purchasing a scheme of work for teachers to work from; you strengthened assessment practices so that assessment has a greater impact on planning; you introduced an online mathematics programme for pupils to use at home; and you introduced more practical resources for pupils to develop their understanding of basic number concepts. As a result, the school's assessment information shows clearly that pupils are now making much better progress in mathematics throughout the school.
- Children continue to make good progress in early years and the proportion who achieved a good level of development in 2015 was well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check was similar to the national average. Pupils continue to make good progress and attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was just above the national average.
- Results in the Key Stage 2 national tests in 2015 were disappointing, particularly in mathematics and the progress pupils made overall. However, there are clear explanations for these weaker results and they are not indicative of a general decline in school standards. Current assessment information shows that pupils are making good progress throughout the school.
- You are determined to improve the life chances of disadvantaged pupils and this is reflected in the very good outcomes for this group of pupils. A new leader has been appointed to take responsibility for this area and she is working closely with her equivalent at the other federation school. The school is working with the local authority to review provision on an ongoing basis. Aspirational targets have been set and appropriate support is in place to help pupils to achieve them. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are very strong and disadvantaged pupils sometimes make better progress than other pupils.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school and a very large majority would recommend it to others. Parents like the school's friendly atmosphere and the way that pupils from different year groups play well together during breaktimes. Parents described the school's strong transition arrangements and were keen to say how well the school supports children and their families both as they join St Nicholas' and when they leave.

- The school's self-evaluation is thorough and accurate but it is too descriptive. The self-evaluation summary is not sufficiently analytical in identifying what needs to be improved. The action plan is very detailed and contains appropriate actions and aspirational targets. However, it lacks milestones to ensure that the plan remains on track to reach your aim of establishing an outstanding school and does not define how the plan will be monitored.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- self-evaluation is analytical rather than descriptive, and that action planning includes monitoring activity and measurable milestones
- the relatively newly formed governing body continues to develop its knowledge and skills and thus its overall effectiveness
- teaching focuses on what teachers want pupils to learn rather than on what they want them to do.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Essex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and two governors. The inspector also spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body on the telephone. The inspector met with the school council and spoke with other pupils throughout the day. The inspector spoke with parents as they brought their children into school and considered the 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. The inspector observed teaching and learning in lessons, jointly with you and the deputy headteacher, looked at the work in pupils' books, and scrutinised a range of school documents.