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Mrs Diane Wright
Principal
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary Academy
Fuller Street
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Wright

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary Academy

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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school. St Mary's is a well-managed school with a calm yet industrious atmosphere. You and the Vice-Principal provide dynamic and energetic leadership. You have successfully established and developed effective whole-school management systems including the monitoring of teaching and tracking of pupils' learning. You and the Vice-Principal are continually evaluating the effectiveness of the school and identifying areas for improvement. Leaders and governors know the school well and have formulated an effective plan for improvement.

The school community has a strong sense of identity, which is grounded in the school's collective values: friendship, aspiration, forgiveness, justice and hope, which you represent as FAITH. These values underpin your:

- expectations of pupils and staff
- care and support for the whole child
- tracking of pupils' learning
- monitoring and development of teaching
- behaviour management
- safeguarding.

All pupils I spoke to enjoy coming to the school and appreciate the help and support they receive. Similarly, all the parents I spoke with valued the lengths leaders, teachers and support staff go to, to put them at ease, support their children and keep them informed about their child's needs and progress. You and your colleagues have engendered a strong sense of family at St Mary's and, as a result, the school is a largely harmonious community. Pupils behave well in lessons and at breaktimes. Adults deal with the rare incidents of misbehaviour promptly and effectively. Consequently, those pupils who have found it more challenging to behave well in the past have improved their behaviour.

Since September 2015, you and the Vice-Principal have improved leaders' capacity to be evaluative. You have developed the way you:

- evaluate standards
- identify areas for whole-school improvement
- identify gaps in the curriculum
- identify gaps in pupils' learning
- evaluate the impact of specific funding streams such as the pupil premium grant or specific interventions to improve pupil progress.

You and the Vice-Principal are detailed in your analysis of pupils' progress in the early years and in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2. Consequently, you know exactly which pupils are making good progress and which need to catch up. You put in place effective support for those pupils who need to catch up and evaluate the impact of that support to check it has had the desired effect.

Leaders have worked effectively with governors to evaluate standards and, as a result, the governors also know the school well. Leaders have correctly identified that pupils' progress in writing in 2015 at Key Stage 2 was not good enough. Leaders recognised that this was because too few of the most-able pupils made more progress than expected in writing and a very small number of disadvantaged pupils did not make the progress expected.

Leaders have taken effective action to address previous weaknesses by:

- tracking pupils carefully to ensure more pupils, and particularly the most able and disadvantaged, are making accelerated progress
- challenging and supporting teachers to ensure pupils make as much progress as possible
- providing coaching, training, support and guidance to staff on how to teach writing more effectively
- moderating teachers' assessments and raising their expectations of pupils
- providing more opportunities for writing to be grounded in first-hand experiences or by using stimulating drama activities or literature resources
- providing more opportunities for pupils to talk in preparation for writing.

Evidence in books shows that pupils are now making better progress. You understand that you will need to embed and develop the effective action taken since September 2015 further if pupils are to make sufficient progress in writing over the year.

Previously, governors have not ensured that the impact of funding such as the pupil premium grant or the physical education and sport premium were evaluated effectively. You and governors have taken effective measures so that they can evaluate this year's funding. Governors have not fulfilled their statutory duty with regard to the school website, including the posting of these evaluations.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust, effective and fit for purpose. You, the designated lead for safeguarding and two other members of staff have all received the safeguarding lead training. Adults know what is expected of them because you have ensured that they have all received safeguarding training this year and all teachers have completed the 'Prevent' guidance online training. The designated safeguarding lead has ensured that staff and visitors know what is expected of them, and that pupils know who they can trust and who they can go to if they need help. The designated lead is rigorous and unremitting in her pursuit of the relevant colleagues if she believes the system is not working as it should.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors know the school well. Since taking up post in September 2015, you and the Vice-Principal have undertaken a detailed evaluation of the standards achieved by the school. As a result, leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the areas that need to improve. Leaders and governors have developed an effective school 'excellence' plan that sets out how you will improve pupils' outcomes, standards of teaching, leadership and management, early years provision, personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics were in line with the national average in 2015.
- Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading and mathematics were above the national average in 2015. Standards in writing were broadly in line with the national average, but below for the most-able pupils.
- Leaders' analysis of pupil performance information showed that the most-able Year 6 pupils and a small number of disadvantaged pupils did not make sufficient progress in writing by the end of Key Stage 2 last year. Since September, you have taken effective action to address this; work in pupils'

books shows that they are making good progress. Leaders have enabled pupils to take ownership of their learning. For example, 'My Amazing Journey' is an effective strategy that enables pupils to understand their learning, the challenges they face and the progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics as well as across other areas of learning, behaviour and welfare.

- Leaders track pupils' progress diligently through termly progress meetings and termly special educational needs meetings. They know those pupils who have fallen behind and leaders have ensured that the appropriate support or intervention is provided so that the pupils can catch up. Leaders and teachers then monitor the impact of the support to check that the actions have been successful. This detailed approach also enables leaders and subject leaders to determine those areas of the curriculum that need to be taught more effectively. In addition, it enables leaders to identify groups of pupils that may need an alternative approach if they are to make good progress. As a result, leaders and subject leaders are able to revise the curriculum or provide teachers with help and guidance. Governors take a strategic overview of pupils' progress at each curriculum committee meeting in order to question leaders about the progress of groups such as disadvantaged pupils.
- Previously, leaders and governors have not evaluated the impact of the pupil premium funding on the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils or the impact of sports funding on pupils' participation. You addressed this in September and have set the criteria to evaluate this year's funding. You track the impact of pupil premium funding for each pupil effectively and are using your evaluations to good effect. Governors effectively monitor the impact of the funding spent on a regular basis.
- The governing body has not fulfilled its duty to ensure the school website is complete and up to date. For example, the evaluation of pupil premium funding 2014/15 is not included on the website.
- School baseline assessments show that children enter the early years at levels below those typical for their age, and this year well below. Children, including boys and the small number of children eligible for free school meals, make good progress in Reception from their starting points.
- Pupils' learning journeys and assessment information demonstrate that assessment is effective and that pupils' learning is carefully tracked by teachers and leaders. This assessment information supports teachers' planning so that the learning they provide meets the needs of the pupils and engages them in their learning.
- The early years indoor learning environment is stimulating and interesting. Leaders and teachers provide an enabling learning environment where children can choose the resources they want. The wide range of equipment and resources available in the outdoor space enable children to engage in a

range of learning activities such as reading and writing in the reading hut or writing with chalk. The outdoor environment is open to the elements on two sides which can restrict its use. It is also limited in size but leaders overcome this by extending it into the playground when older pupils are in class.

- The proportion of children in the early years who speak English as an additional language has increased rapidly in the past two years and now accounts for more than half of the children. The vast majority of these children join the early years with little English. The early years curriculum is not yet fully adapted to meet their language needs and leaders recognise the need to develop their practice further to ensure the children with little English are able to make good progress.
- The caring, friendly and aspirational ethos that leaders and governors have developed at St Mary's pervades every element of the school. Parents commented that this has developed even further since you and the Vice-Principal took over. Pupils enjoy coming to the school and most parents would recommend the school to another parent. Behaviour is good; pupils respond positively to initiatives such as the school's ambassadors, and behaviour 'stars of the week'.
- Leaders have a detailed view of attendance and work effectively with those families that find it difficult to ensure their children attend school as often as they should. Attendance is currently above the national average.
- You and the designated safeguarding lead make certain that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. You provide staff with appropriate and effective training so that they understand their role in safeguarding procedures and the risks faced by pupils. Pupils who I spoke with were clear that they were safe and that staff helped to keep them safe. Pupils shared with me how they are taught to be safe in their day-to-day life, including when using the internet.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, particularly the more able and the disadvantaged, make strong progress in writing by continuing to track progress carefully and intervening so that pupils who fall behind can catch up
- the early years curriculum is reviewed to ensure that all pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress
- the impact of funding streams such as the pupil premium grant is evaluated
- they fulfil their duty to meet statutory requirements with regard to the school's website.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the Regional Schools Commissioner and

the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Derek Myers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The Principal and Vice-Principal were appointed in September 2015 following a year covering for the substantive Principal who maintained overall control of the school.

During the inspection, I met with you, the Vice-Principal, the English and mathematics leads, the business manager, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and two governors. We discussed your current school self-evaluation and your 'excellence' plan. I reviewed both of them. You and I visited classrooms and learning areas to observe teaching, talk to pupils, and look at their work. I evaluated information about pupils' progress, attendance and exclusion. I observed and talked with pupils in their classes and met with 12 pupils. I met with you and the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed your systems, processes and records relating to safeguarding. We undertook a scrutiny of work from a sample of pupils. I met with a number of parents at the beginning of the school day and considered their views alongside the responses from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I spoke with a member of the diocese education team and a representative of the trust. I also reviewed the school's website and checked how effectively the PE and sport premium for primary schools and the pupil premium grant are used.