

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs S Ryan
Headteacher
Fingringhoe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Church Road
Fingringhoe
Colchester
CO5 7BN

Dear Mrs Ryan

Requires improvement: monitoring visit to Fingringhoe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 July 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection. Would you also thank your head of school on my behalf, who worked with me at the school during the course of the day?

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the visit, I spoke with you on the telephone, met with the head of school, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, a representative from the diocese, and the lead standards and excellence officer from the local authority to discuss the actions being taken to improve the school. I scrutinised a range of documents, looked with pupils at the work in their books, and visited lessons for all year groups.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been many changes in both leadership and staffing. The interim headteacher left the school in February 2016. The part-time deputy head was appointed as full-time acting head of school from February half term, prior to your appointment as the permanent headteacher at Easter. However, following a brief period in post, you have been working remotely from home, very ably supported by your head of school. Your planned return to school in the autumn term is being supported well by the local authority and governing body.

There have been several other changes to staffing, which, in a small school like Fingringhoe, has been challenging. However, you and the head of school have ensured that the school has continued to make improvements and that these staffing changes have had a minimal negative impact on pupils' outcomes. Currently, there is interim leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities. This has stretched the capacity of current leaders and has slowed the progress of this group. The governing body has plans in place for September to ensure that the progress of these pupils is accelerated and leadership of this area is secure. Despite all of the challenges, the morale of staff is good. They have been working hard to do what is required of them to improve teaching, learning and pupil outcomes.

Main findings

New systems for checking on teaching and pupil progress have been introduced. The extensive work that has been done to ensure that teachers' judgements of pupils' outcomes are accurate is clear. Leaders have undertaken moderation with other schools and the local authority has checked teachers' assessment of children in the early years, and Years 2 and 6. These checks have shown that teachers are growing in confidence and are competently assessing pupils' work in reading and writing. You and the head of school recognise that assessment of mathematics is less secure. Teachers have been over-reliant on a published scheme which you feel has not given them the confidence needed to accurately judge where their pupils are in their learning. Following thorough self-evaluation, you have taken the decision to alter the way that mathematics is taught and assessed. From September, you have engaged the support of a mathematics specialist who will work initially with Year 6 and then across the school.

It was clearly evident as your head of school and I visited classes during my visit that teachers are using assessment information well and planning effectively to meet the needs of pupils in the majority of the classes. We saw adults skilfully asking pertinent questions to encourage pupils to think carefully about what they are learning. As a result, pupils were able to talk about their learning and explain how they knew they were successful. The quality of writing in the key stage 1 class is very impressive. The latest assessment information supports what we saw. An

increasing proportion of pupils throughout the school are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Learning behaviours are good in the majority of classes. In those where they are not as developed, pupils show they have the capacity to make good progress when encouraged to do so. This is because you and your head of school have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching. The many actions that you have put in place are already showing signs of being effective, particularly where teaching is now good. In these classes, pupils benefit from effective feedback in line with the school's new marking policy. Pupils say they find this helps them to know what they need to do 'to get even better'.

Following the previous inspection, interim leaders immediately began work with the experienced and skilled governing body. You and your head of school have now highlighted where improvement still needs to be made. However, the school's plans for improvement, while sharper than they were, still do not relate closely enough to pupil outcomes. You acknowledge that, by tightening the plans, governors will be better able to see the effectiveness of the actions taken by leaders. Governors are already beginning to challenge leaders about the quality of teaching and how leaders' actions are improving pupils' outcomes. Governors now receive comprehensive information about the current performance of all pupils, knowing that it is more accurate than it has been previously. For example, you have identified that there are gaps in pupils' mathematical skills in upper key stage 2, and there is still some inconsistency in rates of progress between subjects and across some year groups. Governors I met with today have agreed that these aspects will be included in their monitoring of the school's work from the autumn term.

During my visit, I looked at pupils' work in their books, talked to pupils about their work and scrutinised leaders' monitoring of pupil outcomes. The school's assessment information of pupils currently in the school shows that achievement of the majority of pupils is increasing. Indications are that the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year in 2016 is just below that expected. However, the progress of this class from low starting points is good. The proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has risen considerably since 2015 and is above the current national average. Outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 2 are not yet in line with the national average, although they have risen for three years. Pupils in this year group have made substantial progress in the last year. They have the capacity to continue to do so in Year 3, ably supported by their current teacher. Pupils at the end of key stage 2 have likewise made good progress during the last year. Their attainment, however, remains below that of other pupils nationally in 2016.

Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the provision in the early years. The outside area is a bright and interesting space for children to go to. Activities now focus on developing children's basic reading, writing and number skills. You, along with the early years staff, have transformed the learning in this class.

During the visit, I saw children working well together, discussing their learning and sharing what they had found with their peers. Children spoke confidently with me about their 'magic potions' and what they were putting in them. They were making 'super worms' and eagerly comparing theirs with other children's to see which was 'the biggest' or 'the strongest'. Adults develop children's language very effectively by asking questions and gently guiding children to think about what they are learning. Children are clearly used to this way of working and are keen to tell visitors. One girl playing with a football demonstrated very advanced physical skills for her age. 'I love football and could watch and play it all day', she told me. Adults actively encourage the independent development of such interests that children show, and regularly record what children can do and what they need to get better at.

Support provided by the local authority since the last inspection has been effective. Advisers have been in regular contact with you, your head of school and chair of governors during this challenging time. The local authority has also brokered continuing leadership support for the autumn term. Coupled with leaders' determination, the local authority and diocese have supported you and your head of school to raise pupils' standards and improve teaching.

Ofsted will continue monitoring the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will ensure that you are informed of the date for the next 'Getting to Good' seminar that Ofsted organises for headteachers and chairs of governors.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of children's and young people's services for Essex, and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector