

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr James Siddle  
Headteacher  
The St Margaret's Church of England School, Withern  
Main Road  
Withern  
Alford  
Lincolnshire  
LN13 0NB

Dear Mr Siddle

### **Short inspection of The St Margaret's Church of England School, Withern**

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 October 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your staff have worked tirelessly to address the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. These areas have improved dramatically as a result. Parents are overwhelming in their praise for the efforts taken by you and your staff to develop their child's passion for learning. They were keen to stress to the inspector the high value placed on this small and extremely caring school community. One parent commented that she 'couldn't imagine a better start for her children'.

You are passionate that pupils' learning is at the heart of everything that you do and have taken innovative approaches to tackle the learning needs of each child. This includes developing an academic-research approach to providing pupils with feedback about their learning, including the use of digital technology. Pupils are now very used to discussing their learning with their teachers. Teachers regularly use the information received to plan precisely for pupils' learning needs. You believe that this approach, along with the highly creative outdoor curriculum, has been influential in driving the positive improvements seen. Currently, you are seconded for part of your week in order to continue this research and to collaborate with other schools.

The previous inspection report highlighted the need for leaders to raise standards in reading and writing, particularly in the early years, but also for older pupils. In the

early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is now above the national average. In 2016, all pupils achieved the expected standard in phonics. At key stage 2 in 2016, the proportion of pupils meeting age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics was well above the national average. Leaders have successfully raised pupils' achievement.

Inspectors at the previous inspection identified the need for pupils to write for a variety of purposes, and also for them to learn about how other children live. Leaders are fully addressing these identified areas. Pupils receive a vast range of experiences to draw on in their future learning, particularly in science, religious education, mathematics and English. You are rightly proud of the school's curriculum and have worked successfully to ensure that it provides creative, rich and meaningful learning for pupils. For example, every week each class has an allotted time to work outside in the specially designed outdoor learning areas, including a science laboratory and a variety of gardens, including a music garden. The inspector saw pupils happily and successfully learning about biology and the world around them. At key stage 2, pupils achieve higher than expected standards for their age in science. There are further creative opportunities for pupils to be involved, including in music and in digital film making. The film making, in particular, provides a positive stimulus for pupils' extended writing. Outcomes in writing have improved overall.

A further area for improvement from the previous inspection was to raise the profile of the governing body so that more people are familiar with its members and the work it does. There is a new chair of the governing body. New members, including parents, have joined this group. Governors know the staff and the pupils extremely well. They are now well known by the parent community. Many are regularly involved in the life of the school. Governors have effective oversight of the school finances. Committee structures are in place and are helpful. This is a positive improvement. Moving forward, governors require further help to scrutinise the published information about pupils' outcomes. Additionally, they should demand that leaders' improvement planning contains precise milestones in order that proposed actions can be closely checked to ensure impact.

As a leader within a small school, you are acutely aware of the implications of pupils' absence. You believe that all pupils should regularly be in school and learning. If pupils do not attend school, leaders and teachers are aware of the issues. Communication with parents is good. Overall, pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. You believe that this figure should be higher. Although small in number, there are still some pupils who regularly do not attend school. We agreed that a more strategic approach to ensuring more regular attendance was needed and that more focused support should be put in place for those pupils who are frequently absent.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

In this very small school, pupils are known extremely well by leaders, governors and by all staff. Parents are welcomed to discuss their child and any concerns that they

may have. Extensive activities take place to support families and encourage their involvement in their child's learning. Leaders work successfully to ensure an ethos of care. Parents told me that this was a particularly special quality of the school. Staff said that they were proud to work at the school because of this.

The curriculum, particularly the outdoor learning, supports pupils to appreciate and learn how to keep safe in a range of circumstances and about the risks that they may encounter. All pupils with whom I spoke said that they felt safe and happy in school.

Leaders manage the recruitment of staff efficiently. Records relating to this are well kept. All staff have regular discussions about how to keep children safe. An up-to-date safeguarding policy is in place.

You recognise that, moving forward, a more strategic and sharper approach is needed to manage some of the documentation relating to pupils' safeguarding and welfare.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have dealt with the areas of improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders have significantly improved pupils' outcomes, in mathematics and English and also in a range of creative subjects and in science.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils experience a broad, creative and exciting curriculum. They learn about people who have different faiths and differing experiences to their own. The outdoor curriculum is a special feature of the school's work. All pupils gain the opportunity to learn about the science around them, grow food, make music in the open air and create stories and poetry. Leaders take seriously their role in helping pupils to be passionate about their learning, and they are successful in this.
- The governing body provides effective support and knows the school well. Governors have evaluated how effective they are and adapted the committee structure, ways of working and membership, in order to conduct their role in a professional manner. They have maintained good oversight of the school's finances and have offered appropriate challenge to leaders. They acknowledge that they require additional training to understand better the published information about pupils' outcomes. Additionally, the current school improvement plan lacks the precise detail to enable them to more effectively evaluate the progress made by leaders in bringing about desired improvements.
- Leaders are aware of the pupils who do not attend school regularly and the reasons for this. In this very small school, pupils and their families are known well. You have correctly identified this issue as one that requires further focus.
- The headteacher is seconded to another role for part of the week. The early years leader becomes the acting headteacher in his absence. Governors believe that this arrangement is working well. Close monitoring is in place and is required. Governors are aware of the need to keep on checking that this new and talented leader has the time and training to conduct this role well and is not

overwhelmed by conducting this and the other roles she undertakes in the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further ensure that the records linked to pupils' safety and welfare, including those relating to staff training, are precise and are well kept
- tighten further the systems to track and monitor pupils' attendance and have in place effective support for those pupils at risk of regularly not attending school
- make sure that all governors receive high-quality training so that they better understand the published information about the progress that pupils make within the school
- ensure that strategic documents include clear milestones as to when key actions will be completed and what the proposed outcomes will be
- continue to keep on checking that the acting headteacher receives the guidance and the support she requires.

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

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

My inspection focused upon a number of lines of enquiry. These were:

- whether the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection had been dealt with effectively
- what leaders are doing to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly
- what leaders are doing to ensure that more pupils achieve at greater depth
- whether the safeguarding procedures are effective.

During the inspection, I met with you, and the acting headteacher, the chair of the governing body and four governors. I reviewed safeguarding procedures, the school behaviour and bullying logs, accident books, risk assessments and staff safeguarding training certification. I met with all staff during the morning briefing meeting. I spoke with eight parents and considered the views of a further nine parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, 'Parent View'. In addition, I considered a

range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, pupils' performance and pupils' attendance information.

The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.