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Miss Amy King
Headteacher
St Nicholas' Church of England Infants' School and Nursery Class, Wallingford
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Dear Miss King

Short inspection of St Nicholas' Church of England Infants' School and Nursery Class, Wallingford

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2017, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide incisive and effective leadership. Since taking up post 18 months ago, you have provided much-needed drive and direction. You have tackled areas of significant weakness and reversed the decline in the quality of teaching that had occurred since the previous inspection. Self-evaluation is honest and plans for improvement are focused sharply on what will make the most difference for your pupils. Pupils enjoy school. Well-planned, engaging teaching helps them learn well. Children in Nursery and Reception benefit from a stimulating environment indoors and outside. The school's values, clear routines and high expectations for behaviour are instilled right from the start. The school environment is calm, orderly and caring. All are included. Pupils are well cared for, supported and kept safe. They learn to be kind and thoughtful to one another. Pupils are clear that they should treat all with equal respect regardless of any differences. Parents are full of praise for the school and your leadership.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the many strengths of the school. They identified three areas for specific attention. One was to ensure that the teaching of English and mathematics consistently provides suitable challenge for pupils with different starting points and the most able in particular. The second was to place greater emphasis on the development of writing skills, and the third was to develop subject leaders' roles in driving improvement. Teaching in English and mathematics is now increasingly effective. Pupils, including the most able and those from

disadvantaged backgrounds, typically make good progress. Pupils' achievement in writing, although not as strong as in reading and mathematics, is improving quickly. Due to significant changes in staff, subject leadership development remains an area for attention. Rightly, this is a priority in your school improvement plan for this year and suitable work is underway.

On arrival, you got to grips quickly with developing the curriculum to align with national requirements. Alongside this, you set up a suitable approach to assessing and tracking pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. Leaders and governors can now see at a glance how well different groups of pupils are achieving. The pressing need to secure improvements in English and mathematics means that assessment and monitoring in other subjects is at quite an early stage of development. As a result, leaders and governors do not have a really sharp understanding of pupils' achievement in these other subjects.

The fairly new team of governors is holding leaders to account increasingly well. You have made sure governors have the information needed to gain an accurate view of most aspects of the schools' performance and the effectiveness of leaders' actions to bring further improvement. Encouragingly, governors recognise the areas of their work that need further attention. Reviews of the suitability and impact of some school policies and strategies is not consistently timely. Governors know the school's values help create a tolerant and caring community. However, they do not have an incisive understanding of the impact of work to promote equality or how well the curriculum is preparing pupils for life in modern Britain.

Despite your best efforts, disadvantaged pupils' attendance remains an area for attention. Your work with families has improved attendance for some but you know that further action is needed. You are tightening your approach to the use of fixed penalty notices and seeking to fill the currently vacant post of home-school link worker to this end.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Checks on the suitability of staff are sound. Regular training and briefings ensure that staff know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils' welfare. You alert staff to any issue they need to be aware of when a pupil may be vulnerable and need extra care. You are diligent and persistent in making referrals to the local authority when needed. Pupils say that they feel safe, and bullying is almost unheard of. Parents agree. A helpful safeguarding section of the school website provides parents with useful information about how to keep their children safe and what to do if they have any concerns. You are always considering further improvements. For example, leaders are revisiting the way pupils are taught about safety in the world and online.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have successfully developed the key stage 1 curriculum in line with national requirements. Suitable assessment processes have been set up for English and mathematics. Teachers understand pupils' starting points and set work accordingly. Leaders collect and analyse information about teaching quality and pupils' achievement. They and governors have a clear insight into the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes in these subjects and where improvement might be needed. However, monitoring and assessment in other subjects is not so well developed. As such, leaders and governors do not have a routinely incisive understanding of the quality of teaching beyond English and mathematics.
- Teaching in Nursery and Reception is increasingly effective. Children, including those with low starting points, make good progress. In 2016, the proportion reaching a good level of development was in line with the national average.
- Pupils make good progress in reading throughout the school. Changes in groupings for phonics sessions and training for staff have helped ensure best use of time. You have spent wisely on reading books that help pupils apply their phonics skills. Pupils read books at suitable levels of challenge. Teaching equips those who find reading difficult with the skills needed to tackle tricky words and develop a joy of reading. Better, more regular, assessment of pupils' phonics skills is helping leaders ensure that extra support is swiftly in place for those who need it. The most able read with confidence, using their understanding of grammatical devices to read fluently and expressively.
- Pupils typically write well across a range of subjects. Many, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, display stamina and resolve as they write successfully at length. Pupils whose previous achievement in writing has been weak have made rapid progress this year. Because of the previously inconsistent quality of teaching, these pupils are typically not yet competent writers for their age. However, they are quickly making up for lost ground.
- Most governors, including the chair, have joined the governing body relatively recently. They have recognised previous insufficiencies and are determined to get things right. Progressively, governors are gaining a strong insight into the school's performance and providing the robust challenge and support you seek. Improved, helpful planning and reporting have enabled greater scrutiny. Governors recognise that their approach to reviewing school policies and procedures has not ensured that all are considered in good time. Additionally, leaders and governors do not have a really sharp understanding of the school's work to meet the public sector equality duty and prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Work with the families of children with high absence rates has brought some improvement. Nevertheless, a small group of disadvantaged pupils continue to have poor attendance.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of specified information about the physical education and sports premium, governance and special educational needs on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment and monitoring consistently provide the information needed to identify and tackle any area for attention in science and foundation subjects
- the effectiveness of school policies and strategies is routinely well understood
- they have an incisive understanding of the extent to which the curriculum promotes pupils' understanding of equalities and prepares them for life in modern Britain
- work to improve attendance is increasingly effective, particularly for those who are disadvantaged.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included considering the impact of leaders' work to improve teaching in reading and writing so it meets the needs of pupils with different starting points and those who are disadvantaged. We also agreed to: look at how successfully the school's new curriculum and related assessment approaches are being led and implemented; consider the improvements leaders have made to provision in early years; explore the effectiveness of the relatively new group of governors; and look at the impact of work to improve attendance.

During the day I held further discussions with you. I met the chair of the governing body and four other governors. I visited eight lessons with you and we scrutinised a selection of pupils' work. I observed you listen to pupils read and discuss their reading with them. I took account of 18 staff survey responses and 72 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I considered 32 parent responses by free-text and phone call. I also considered 27 responses to the pupil survey, spoke with some parents before school and staff and pupils during the day. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures.