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Mr S Smith
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Lodge Hill Road
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Birmingham
West Midlands
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Dear Mr Smith,

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and governors have managed a period of considerable change as St Mary's grows to become a two-form entry school. This process has called upon the strategic planning skills of leaders and governors. The management of change has been effective and has not distracted leaders from the day-to-day focus of developing the quality of teaching and raising standards. Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are improving year on year, particularly in reading and maths. Pupils are well positioned to move onto their next phase of learning by the time they leave in Year 6.

You and the team at St Mary's have created an impressive culture where a focus on values is at the heart of all that you do. The values of forgiveness, respect, compassion, courage, honesty and perseverance are evident throughout the school. You are proud of your Christian ethos and have developed several prayer areas around the school where pupils can take time to reflect and think.

Leaders and governors have paid close attention to succession planning and ensuring that the school continues to develop regardless of any potential change. As a result, you have many capable leaders and governors who are keen to take on responsibilities and use their expertise to tackle any weaknesses.

At the last inspection the school was asked to improve two specific areas. The first of these was a focus on accelerating pupils' achievement in mathematics. You have tackled this focus by securing improvements in teaching and strengthening the curriculum. Teaching has improved through a programme of opportunities for staff to share what they do in the classroom. You and leaders have also quickly established support to improve any teaching that you have judged to require development. Leaders communicate consistently high expectations of staff. The curriculum has also been overhauled following changes at a national level. The curriculum provides pupils with a range of rich opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills. As a result of your work, achievement in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 is well above national levels.

The second area for improvement identified at the last inspection was the development of assessment. Assessment procedures have changed at St Mary's to reflect the introduction of the new curriculum and shift in expectations. Tracking systems provide you and your staff with information about outcomes across the school. This information is used by leaders at all levels to measure the extent to which pupils are working towards, at and beyond the levels expected of them. Following analysis, leaders effectively devise any necessary additional support. However, this system is relatively new and has not yet evolved to fully take account of the progress rates of different groups of pupils. As a result, it can be difficult to compare some aspects of pupil performance and act upon any trends.

While there has been some significant improvement in outcomes, you and your leaders recognise that there is scope for pupils to receive an even greater level of challenge across some aspects of the curriculum. Work in pupils' mathematics books evidences that, on occasion, tasks can sometimes be too easy for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have created a culture of safeguarding at the school. The staff that I spoke to are clear about the actions they must take if they have any concerns. Your recording systems demonstrate how you diligently follow up concerns and act upon the advice of other agencies. Pupils receive regular updates and reminders about how to stay safe online. Pupils that I spoke to, and those that responded to the online survey, report that they feel safe.

Inspection findings

- Children looked after are well supported by the school. The designated teacher for this group of pupils understands her role well and has worked with partner agencies to agree targets for pupils to work towards based on their individual needs. Teachers attend pupils' reviews so that agreed targets are at the forefront of daily learning back in the classroom. This demonstrates the school's commitment to ensuring that the pastoral and academic needs of children looked after are fully addressed.
- The quality of teaching is improving across the school. Any underperformance is tackled quickly. Leaders believe that the establishment of a programme for

teachers to share their practice has been the cornerstone of improvements. These improvements are resulting in stronger rates of progress and a higher level of challenge.

- Books evidence the strong rates of progress that pupils are making. This is particularly evident in the wider curriculum. In Year 4, teachers have used the themes of 'Potions' and 'America' to plan exciting programmes of learning for pupils. Work in books is well presented. Pupils take pride in what they do and demonstrate a real thirst for knowledge. Despite these considerable successes, we did summarise that there was scope for an even greater level of challenge in some aspects of learning. On occasion, pupils find work too easy to complete and activities are not routinely adapted to help them make more rapid rates of progress.
- Leaders and governors ensure that pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Books show clear progress and the additional support that has been devised for disadvantaged pupils is having a positive impact.
- The needs of disadvantaged children within the early years foundation stage are also well known to staff. Changes to the learning environment and curriculum are resulting in higher levels of engagement from vulnerable groups. Staff have also established wider opportunities for parents to share the progress and successes of their children. These programmes include the popular 'proud cloud' gatherings on Friday afternoons.
- Leaders and governors are not entirely clear about the extent to which disadvantaged pupils are progressing compared with other pupils nationally. You acknowledge that assessment systems require further development to help you track the precise achievement of this group of pupils more closely.
- Writing is well promoted across the curriculum and books evidence strong rates of progress. Pupils are given opportunities to practise their writing skills in a wide range of genres. Topic books provide excellent examples of pupils' ability to write at length and with a clear purpose.
- The vast majority of parents are happy with the standard of education at St Mary's and would recommend the school to another parent. Parents are particularly proud of the support received from leaders and the nurturing ethos of the school. Typical comments from parents include: 'My child is very happy at this school. She is well looked after by the teachers and she has many friends' and 'My children both love going to St Mary's school. It prides itself on being caring and nurturing each child to their full potential.' Some parents did raise concerns about the expansion programme for the school. However, I found that leaders and governors are giving great thought to how they maximise the space available and secure further improvements.
- The school's adviser from the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) has worked with the school to support the review of self-evaluation and resulting school development plans. The adviser has adopted a light touch approach with the school given the outcomes that have been secured in recent years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems evolve further so that the specific progress of different groups of pupils is fully understood and acted upon
- teachers' planning develops further, particularly in maths, so that pupils are provided with further challenge and activities are altered if learning is too easy or too hard
- the strongest teaching that exists within the school continues to be shared so that rates of progress are accelerated even further.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with the school's senior leadership team to review self-evaluation and school improvement documents. As a result of our discussions we agreed several key lines of enquiry.

I met with parents at the school gate, reviewed the 79 freetext responses to the online parent survey and the 83 responses on Parent View. I also took account of the 60 responses online from pupils and 22 survey responses from staff.

I met with the school's administration team and headteacher to review the school's single central record and sample the contents of personnel files. I discussed the management of safeguarding with the headteacher and assistant headteacher and scrutinised a range of documents including: electronic child protection files, referrals to the local authority, risk assessments, training records, pupil education plans for children looked after, induction procedures and policies.

I conducted a learning walk across key stage 1 and undertook scrutinies of books both in class and within Year 4. These inspection activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.

I heard pupils read from Year 2 and talked to pupils about their learning throughout the inspection.

I met with two members of the school's governing body and the clerk to the governing body who is a national leader of governance. I spoke to the adviser from BEP via the telephone and met her in person at the school's feedback meeting at the end of the inspection.