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Dear Mr Burden

Short inspection of Great Waltham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 previous inspection. Pupils learn and staff teach in a very happy environment. Pupils clearly enjoy their learning. This was confirmed by parents with whom I spoke after the assembly and in the 61 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire 'Parent View'. The overwhelming majority of parents agree that their child is happy at school. Similarly, very nearly all of the parents responding agree that their child makes good progress. The group of pupils I spoke to, and the 52 pupils who completed the Ofsted pupil questionnaire, reflect their parents' views. Pupils say they are happy at school.

The assembly led by class 'North America' (Years 5–6) demonstrated a rich and wide curriculum. The pupils showcased their learning in English, geography, science, history, music, art, French, physical education, religious education, computing and mathematics to parents. Pupils spoke confidently and interestingly about their work. Later in the morning, we visited each class together. We saw pupils productively engaged in a range of lessons covering music, where Year 1 pupils were using correct musical language such as pitch and tempo, science, where Year 2 pupils talked enthusiastically about their experiment and discussed whether it was a fair test, art, where Year 3 and 4 pupils were studying the artist Georgia O'Keeffe and producing their own art in her style. In Years 5 and 6 mathematics, pupils were actively engaged in finding the missing angle in polygons with work that

was matched to the ability of different groups of pupils. In Years 4 and 5 English, pupils were improving their extended writing by using clauses.

The curriculum is further enhanced by learning a musical instrument (we saw all the pupils in class 'North America' playing the ukulele), learning about money in enterprise week and visits such as to the science museum adding to pupils' sense of awe and wonder. Leaders and governors acknowledge that there are limited opportunities within school for pupils to mix with people from different backgrounds. However, you seek opportunities to raise pupils' awareness of different faiths and cultures and prepare them for life in modern Britain by a combination of visits out of school and visitors to the school.

At the school's previous inspection leaders were asked to 'strengthen the quality of teaching'. Since then, there have been staff changes and staff training. Teachers speak positively about how shared training with other local schools has had a positive impact on their approach to teaching and, in turn, pupils' progress. You have focused strongly on improving the effectiveness of assessment and developing a whole-school marking policy which is used across the school. Pupils in class 'North America' are particularly positive about how the use of the policy helps them to improve their work.

In all the lessons visited, pupils were well behaved. Around the school they are polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils get on very well together. The majority of pupils say that behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Parents agree. The overwhelming majority responding to Parent View agree, and the majority strongly agree that pupils are well behaved. Parents report that any occasional misbehaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. All 26 staff responding to Ofsted's questionnaire reported that behaviour is consistently at least good and staff manage behaviour well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Governors and leaders are rigorous in ensuring that all safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are effective. For example, a governor makes termly checks on recruitment records. The school benefits from the relevant expertise of the safeguarding governor. Child protection files are well organised, and staff are vigilant in reporting any concerns regarding the welfare of pupils.

Staff training has a high profile. All staff received training at the end of August, which included the latest Department for Education safeguarding guidance. Training was re-visited recently and new midday assistants received training this week. Most importantly, parents' responses and discussion with staff point to a culture of safeguarding and care which permeates the school. Internet safety has a high profile, with Year 6 pupils telling me that it is mentioned at the start of every computing lesson.

Very nearly all parents believe their child is safe in school with typical comments including, 'it is the pastoral side I have always been equally impressed with'. Parents speak positively about 'the buddy system where a reception child is linked to and looked after by a Year 6 child' and 'the importance put upon the caring side of life'. However, three of the 52 children responding to the pupil questionnaire thought that teachers were not good at dealing with bullying, and a very small number of parents raised concerns about their child being bullied. By Year 6, pupils are clear regarding the nature of bullying, the different forms it may take and that teachers and the headteacher would take it very seriously.

Inspection findings

- The school has had a history of small variations in pupils' progress from year to year. In 2016, pupils' progress from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 was in line with other schools nationally. Given the variations in previous years, I wanted to find out how well current pupils are progressing. I found that you have introduced a more rigorous approach to checking pupils' progress. This is enabling you to identify individual pupils' weaknesses in individual subjects better, and put in place extra support where needed. You are confident that this will help you to improve the progress of pupils, especially improving the final outcome for pupils' progress across reading, writing and mathematics combined.
- In 2016, pupils taking the Year 1 national test in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) attained in line with other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils did less well than other pupils, and boys did less well than girls. Therefore, I wanted to check the effectiveness of actions to support disadvantaged pupils and boys in acquiring phonics skills. You have placed a strong emphasis on improving the teaching of phonics. I found that pupils in the early years have effective strategies for sounding out letters to read unfamiliar words. By the end of Year 6, pupils' reading ability is well above the national average, and they make very good progress in reading in key stage 2.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics appeared to have improved last year, and I wanted to see what had brought this about and whether the improved standards are likely to be sustained. Pupils' work in books and the school's monitoring information indicate that they continue to make good progress.
- The school's attendance continues to be in line with that found nationally. In 2016, information before the inspection indicated that the overall absence and persistent absence rates for pupils entitled to free school meals and those with special educational needs were well above the rates for other pupils in the school. I wanted to assure myself that actions had been taken to address this. In our discussions you agreed that you had not been quick enough to spot these patterns. You were able to give the reasons behind the individual pupils that had resulted in the attendance pattern. You are taking appropriate action and working with families to increase pupils' resilience and improve attendance.
- In 2016, pupils' attainment and their progress at the end of key stage 2 were both a little above the national average. The very small number of pupils that did not reach the expected standard were all disadvantaged pupils. Therefore, I wanted to be convinced that the needs of disadvantaged pupils are being met. I

found that the school now makes better use of the information about the progress of each individual and provides effective support. For example, time is made available for the class teacher to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils.

- All staff responding to Ofsted's questionnaire believe that the school is better than at the time of the previous inspection. The local authority concurs with this assessment. You were able to show me improved systems and a more consistent quality of teaching. Morale amongst staff is high. Much of your time and effort since the previous inspection has been directed at maintaining the 'good' grade. Governors and leaders have not yet given attention to how the school might build on this grade to become outstanding. Governors and leaders know that the school is not yet outstanding because of the progress in some groups. They do not currently have a plan for getting to a point where outcomes are outstanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the monitoring of attendance identifies patterns and groups more quickly to lead to earlier intervention with families that can build up the resilience of a small number of pupils
- reasons why a very small number of pupils feel unhappy, when the overwhelming majority of staff, pupils and parents are so positive, are investigated
- barriers to the school becoming outstanding are identified, and that school leaders plan how to overcome these barriers.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, teachers and other staff, members of the governing body, a group of pupils, a group of parents and spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority. Together with you, I made short visits to all classes to observe teaching and to see pupils at work. I observed pupils at lunchtime, and I heard some pupils read. I reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. I also considered the 61 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire from parents, 52 from pupils and 26 responses from staff.