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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Parker
Headteacher
Ardleigh St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Colchester Road
Ardleigh
Colchester
Essex
CO7 7NS

Dear Ms Parker

Short inspection of Ardleigh St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You and the senior teacher are committed to ensuring that pupils and children at the school achieve well. You have rightly identified the school's strengths and, more importantly, what the school needs to do to improve further. Your school improvement plan is a well-considered document which identifies the key priorities for the school including: getting the most from your partnership work with other schools; addressing the barriers which stop the school from being outstanding; developing the role of the school council and the pupil voice; and giving pupils greater ownership of their learning. Subject leaders also contribute well towards school improvement planning, and have produced their own brief action plans which tie in with whole-school priorities.

Staff morale is high and teachers feel valued for the work that they do. Parents are also highly complimentary about the school. One parent wrote in response to Ofsted's online survey: 'The school has a very positive feel and vibe. It fits in very well in the community and everybody feels like a family. It is well run and the staff are always helpful. They always have time to deal with any issues or concerns. I am so happy we chose this school for our children, they are very happy here and are learning and progressing well.'

Teaching in the school is good because teachers know their pupils well and typically plan lessons which meet their needs. This is particularly important as you have chosen to teach the pupils in mixed-age groups. You liaise more closely with the pre-school from which you recruit your children. This enables you to develop a better understanding of individual children's needs so that they make a good start when they join St Mary's.

Learning is purposeful and pupils understand the content of what they are learning and how this relates to previous and future learning experiences. The work in their books shows that good progress is being made from their different starting points. Teachers' comments are helpful and pupils respond to these. Pupils also take the opportunity to assess their own work and that of their peers.

Pupils' progress over time continues to be good across a wide range of subjects. This is because you know your pupils well and intervene quickly if a child is at risk of falling behind. You analyse pupils' performance regularly, have challenging discussions with the class teacher, and keep your eye on pupils' performance through the wide range of monitoring activities. These include observations of teaching; scrutiny of pupils' progress towards achieving age-related expectations; and looking at the work in pupils' books. You acknowledge that further work is required to maintain the drive on pushing your most-able pupils so that all achieve as highly as they should. You use the pupil premium funding well to ensure that differences between your few disadvantaged pupils and others nationally continue to steadily diminish. Equally, you target your resources carefully to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well over time.

Pupils are considerate towards one another in lessons and their attitudes towards learning are typically positive. Pupils who receive extra support from additional adults appreciate this and say it has helped them to make better progress. Your well-being mentors have made a major contribution to this aspect of the school's work.

Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. In their discussions, they demonstrated a strong awareness of different types of bullying, as well as an in-depth understanding of e-safety. They said that the teachers are there to look after their needs and they feel they do a good job in keeping them safe. Pupils have a good understanding of the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act (2010). One pupil told me, 'We're all worth the same. You can't put a price on people.'

Pupils have a very good understanding of what makes a model member of the school community. Your effective promotion of British, Christian and Olympic values ensures that pupils understand the importance of democracy, the rule of law, compassion and equality. The school is clearly here to serve the needs of the pupils and you ensure that their views are taken on board. This was evident when I witnessed all pupils in the school from Reception Year to Year 6 working together in an assembly to plan suitable questions to ask potential candidates for a teaching position at the school. Pupils also successfully raised funds along with the 'Friends

of Ardleigh' to purchase new playground equipment, which is enjoyed by all. Links with your partner school in Kenya have also developed pupils' global awareness.

The governing body continues to offer an appropriate degree of challenge and support. My discussion with them demonstrated a sound grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Between them, the governing body has a useful range of skills, of which they make effective use. They are fully up to date with the latest safeguarding matters and ensure that a suitable safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. However, the school's website is currently not compliant as there is no up-to-date published accessibility plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding children is a strong aspect of this school's work. All staff have received and read the latest guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016) and demonstrated a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. All staff have also undergone training in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff, including those who join the school mid-year, receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. A minor administrative flaw in the school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff was rectified swiftly during this inspection and the record is now compliant.

Records kept by the school of children who are at risk or deemed to be vulnerable are very well maintained and informative with details of resolution. They are kept secure, and appropriate external agencies are informed as and when necessary.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my lines of enquiry was to look at how well the school's leaders had addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. This is an indication of the quality of leadership over time.
- You have improved standards in English and in mathematics. You were asked to build on your recently introduced systems for tracking pupils' progress. You responded to this quickly, but realised that further changes were needed with the removal of national curriculum levels. Realising that staff were confused by having to assess progress and attainment at the same time, you simplified the system by using an age-related expectation model closely linked to the new curriculum. This system is becoming embedded and is informing your discussions with individual class teachers when you challenge them about the rates of progress being made by pupils in different year groups.
- You have also ensured that teachers' planning typically meets the needs of pupils of differing abilities or different age groups who are taught in the same class. Teachers skilfully plan lessons to meet these needs. Work is challenging, but occasionally some of the most able pupils could be given even more demanding work, or start tasks at a more difficult level, rather than attempt the easiest tasks first like the rest of the class.

- Your closer working relationship with the pre-school ensures an improved exchange of information and a smoother transition to primary school, and enables children in Reception Year to start at a higher level.
- You have also successfully provided pupils with more opportunities to develop their writing skills. Different subject areas now have targets linked to writing, and your introduction of an award system linked to writing has motivated pupils to write in different styles and in greater depth.
- Pupils have been given greater ownership of what lessons should cover, and this has been made possible through smarter use of your school council which gives pupils an opportunity to make their voice heard.
- My second line of enquiry related to the teaching of phonics. This was because too few pupils met the expected standard in phonics in 2016. To address this shortfall, you have appointed a designated member of staff to be responsible for phonics. This member of staff has visited an outstanding provider to observe good practice and improve the teaching and delivery of phonics in your school. You have also reconsidered the way you group the pupils so that their needs are more appropriately met. I observed phonics being taught well, which had a direct impact on children's learning and progress. It is important that you continue your focus on phonics to ensure that enough pupils are successful in the phonics screening check in 2017.
- The third line of enquiry looked at your strategies to ensure that boys' achievement comes closer to that of girls and how encouraging a greater love of reading might raise standards overall. Rather than focus on boys' achievement specifically, the small size of the school enables you to focus on all pupils. Individual pupils' progress is carefully tracked to enable you to pick up potential underachievement at an early stage. You are actively encouraging boys to read more widely. Your 'chatterbooks' club and your encouraging the reading of 'classics' encourages pupils, including boys, to read a wider range of genres. You have proactively worked with parents so that they encourage their children to read more regularly when at home. Your revised curriculum also promotes reading across a wide range of subjects.
- My fourth line of enquiry looked at the accuracy of your assessments of pupils' progress in the school. With the removal of national curriculum levels, you are currently embedding your new system for measuring progress. The work I saw in pupils' books supports teachers' assessments. Additionally, you have sought out external validation of your assessments by working with other local schools.
- My final line of enquiry reviewed your strategies for improving the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These groups of pupils are also more persistently absent from school than their peers. You analyse the attendance data for these pupils rigorously. In extreme circumstances, you have personally travelled to some of these pupils' homes to collect them and bring them to school. You also showed me some case studies for a few pupils whose personal circumstances have made it difficult for them to attend school regularly. However, you also acknowledge that further work is required to bring the attendance of these groups of pupils closer to that of their classmates.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged further
- the actions taken to improve the quality of teaching of phonics ensure that a greater proportion of pupils meet the expected standard in phonics in Year 1
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improves
- the school's website is fully compliant by publishing an up-to-date accessibility plan.

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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the senior leader, as well as the subject leaders for English and mathematics, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I met with a group of governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement and assessment information for all year groups. I held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. We both undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. I took account of the views of 12 staff and four pupils who responded to the online survey. I also considered the 31 Parent View responses.