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25 April 2017

Mr Christopher Blazey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Blazey

### **Short inspection of St Dubricius Church of England VA School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 May 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 have a stable team around you who fully support your vision of continual improvement. In the past year, you have challenged all staff to learn from the best practice of schools in the local area and this has contributed to improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. You have introduced new target-setting and assessment processes, and these have raised expectations across the school. At the same time, you have preserved the ethos of the school. You are passionate about its role in this close-knit community and the strong links it has with the church.

Pupils work well together in their mixed-age classes. You have ensured that teachers are adept at planning activities which meet the different needs of pupils. In the early years, the majority of children make sound progress from their starting points. Many children join the school with lower ability than is typical for their age. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has risen year-on-year for three years and is now in line with the national average. Pupils enjoy reading and, at the end of key stage 1, a higher proportion than seen nationally attain at a greater depth than expected. You provide a wide range of experiences and these promote pupils' personal development effectively. For example, pupils valued highly the residential visit during which they explored the SS Great Britain and other historic sites in Bristol. Pupils leave at the end of Year 4 well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Since the previous inspection, you have developed pupils' writing style by providing more opportunities for them to write about topical and local themes. This is exemplified by pupils' poetry, composed for Remembrance Day last year, on the theme of a bomber which crashed locally during the second world war. You have ensured that pupils know and understand their individual targets and so they are able to gauge the progress they are making in lessons. Pupils are provided with challenging tasks in mathematics; however, you acknowledge that new curriculum ideas in this subject have not yet been fully implemented throughout the school.

Your ambition for all pupils to excel is illustrated by your emphasis on improving the teaching of phonics in the Reception Year and Years 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 in 2016 was below average. You have increased the time set aside for phonics teaching and you are now working more closely with parents on early reading skills. Most pupils reach the expected standard by the end of Year 2, but you are right to continue to look for improvement.

Last year, the rate of attendance fell below the national average for the first time in several years. You have considered the reasons for this and you are taking appropriate action to make sure that pupils attend school regularly.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to pupils' safety and welfare. They have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Regular training, together with ongoing updates, ensures that all staff can identify indications of harm. Any concerns are acted upon quickly and additional agencies are informed where appropriate. Governors are very aware of their role to hold leaders to account and to ensure that leaders are meeting legal requirements. Thorough checks are conducted on the appointment of staff, governors and volunteers.

Incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are very rare. Pupils report that the good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical and the school's records also demonstrate that this is the case. In particular, pupils are very helpful towards each other, for example older pupils acting as 'buddies' at playtime to provide support for anyone who might feel sad or lonely. Pupils have confidence in their teachers and know that if they have concerns they can talk to any member of staff. Pupils are knowledgeable about internet safety. They say they feel safe, secure and valued. Parents speak highly of the help, support and guidance you and your staff provide. Parents are confident that their children are kept safe at school.

Senior leaders talk to staff regularly in order to maintain safeguarding as a thread running through all aspects of school life. They ensure that everyone in school understands their duty to be alert. Therefore, a culture of vigilance has been established which dovetails with the school's caring Christian ethos.

## Inspection findings

- Senior leaders are supported well by a knowledgeable and highly committed governing body. The chair of governors and her team have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and challenge senior leaders effectively over the progress of all groups of pupils. Consequently, senior leaders' plans for improving the school are focused on the right priorities.
- To judge if the school remained good, the first key line of enquiry considered phonics teaching. Teachers use the everyday experience of pupils well to focus on learning letters and sounds. Teachers ensure that the learning closely matches each pupil's skill level. Senior leaders have invited parents into school to discuss and learn about the methods being used to teach phonics. These workshops have been well received by parents and they are now better placed to help their children at home. Pupils who are at risk of falling behind are given extra help, for example, to improve their speaking and listening skills. Pupils, particularly the youngest pupils, are growing in confidence as a result. However, the school recognises that, once pupils have established their basic phonic skills, they need to move on more rapidly in their reading and apply these skills in their writing.
- A second key line of enquiry centred on pupils' progress in mathematics. In 2016, fewer pupils reached the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 than the national average. Furthermore, pupils of middle ability did not go on to achieve at a greater depth. Senior leaders evaluated the mathematics curriculum and introduced a new programme in September 2016. Teachers introduce pupils to addition, subtraction, multiplication and division effectively and at an appropriate age. However, some pupils in key stage 1 are not self-assured when required to perform calculations quickly. Teachers are now ensuring that pupils develop their ability to solve problems and explain their reasoning when doing so. Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving and so a greater proportion of pupils are on track to attain the expected standard at the end of Year 2 in 2017. Pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4, understand that mathematical problems can be approached in several ways and they can describe several different methods. However, they sometimes lack the confidence to go 'boldly into the unknown' and try these new methods.
- Another key line of enquiry looked at rates of pupils' attendance. These have been good in the past, however, last year the rate of attendance fell to below the national average. Senior leaders have taken steps to raise parents' awareness of the importance of good attendance at school. They have been quick to follow up on absences and avoid those that are not absolutely necessary. Senior leaders are resolute in their stance on attendance but they have maintained good relationships with parents because they are sensitive and communicate in person where possible. Current pupils' attendance is now above average.
- Senior leaders and staff are well respected by pupils and parents. Volunteers from the local community and the church ensure that pupils continue to have access to many facilities. For example, the library is flourishing and pupils are provided with extra help to encourage their reading. Parents recognise that the school provides a good, well-rounded education with rich experiences that go

beyond academic success. One parent's comment was typical of many, 'As a family we could not be happier with the way our son has been nurtured, inspired and cared for.'

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in phonics teaching are built upon and that pupils' knowledge of grammar and punctuation are developed further
- pupils gain greater confidence to use a range of different methods to solve problems in mathematics
- pupils' calculation skills are improved in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and five other governors. I held a telephone conversation with the 'Somerset Education Partner' who advises the school on behalf of the local authority. I held a meeting with the pupils from the school council and spoke with many other pupils informally. I made observations of learning across the school, looked at several examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents including the school's own evaluation of its performance, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, information relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding. I took account of responses to questionnaires from pupils and staff. I also considered the responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.