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Mrs Carrie Prior
Headteacher
St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Great Yeldham
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Dear Mrs Prior

Short inspection of St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Great Yeldham

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, despite considerable issues with recruitment.

Since the previous inspection, the deputy headteacher was promoted to a headship in another school. Both you and she took a period of maternity leave, as did another member of staff. You appointed a new deputy headteacher who has been in post since January 2016 and now has responsibility for mathematics. There have also been changes in leadership of science in May 2017, and a new subject leader for English has been in post since September 2016. You have recruited several teachers from agencies, some being more successful than others in raising standards. You and your governors have been relentless in your desire to recruit and retain only the best teachers and the resulting changes to staff have, therefore, resulted in some instability in teaching in two classes in particular. You and your leadership team have done as much as possible to ensure that this has not affected the progress of these pupils over time. You have encouraged and supported several of your higher level teaching assistants to undertake study to enter the teaching profession, which is having a positive impact on St Andrew's pupils in the meantime.

Several aspects of the school's buildings have been improved. You have now placed yourself at the heart of the school where you have much better access to pupils and parents. The addition of a new library area, a sensory room, a special educational

needs room and the improvement of one classroom have undoubtedly had an impact on pupils' development. It is to your credit that during a time of some flux, you have increased the roll of the school to the point where you are now unable to accommodate any more children from your community. However, you, the diocese and the local authority are working well together to find a solution that will suit the needs of the growing village.

Pupils like coming to their 'fantastic, fun' school and really enjoy spending time with their friends. The new breakfast club has been a great success. It is very well attended, with pupils asking their parents if they can come regularly. As a result, attendance for some of the most vulnerable pupils is improving. I saw pupils eating a healthy breakfast, playing games and cooperating really well with both adults and friends alike. Pupils are a delight. They are polite and enthusiastically welcome visitors. Their conduct around the school, in the dining room and in lessons is very good. Pupils are generally positive about their learning. They listen to the adults and are keen to do their best, especially in mathematics, geography, history and physical education (PE).

You have worked hard to enhance the curriculum since the last inspection. With an appropriate emphasis on English and mathematics, work is planned around a range of interesting topics that appeal to pupils' interests. They told me how much they enjoy the forest schools work, which has particularly benefited some of your most vulnerable pupils. The emphasis you have also placed on science investigations this year shines through in pupils' topic and dedicated science books. The quality of the resulting written work is often better than that in pupils' writing books, suggesting that teachers' expectations are not consistently high. You have also raised the profile of PE in the school. Pupils, staff and governors all spoke passionately about how this has 'transformed the school'. Pupils have benefited from a professional sports instructor. She has ensured that not only are teachers better skilled to teach PE, but pupils are increasingly successful in several different sports at district and county level. The many cups, trophies and certificates are testament to the pupils' collective desire to 'put St Andrew's on the map'. Taking part in the Keeping Dance Alive and Spring Blast events were clearly highlights for parents and pupils. I was delighted to be invited to watch a class of Year 5 and 6 pupils perform their end of year dance. Girls and boys alike gave their all and were clearly proud to be performing for a visitor.

At your previous inspection, you were asked to improve teaching. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics, although disappointing in Year 6 last year, are secure across the school. Pupils animatedly took part in lessons exploring number, patterns, money and averages. Tasks were well supported by appropriate resources, with pupils being given the opportunity to challenge themselves. Most did. However, if they were reluctant to do so, a gentle guiding hand from the adults encouraged them to use two of the school's core values: challenge and determination. Many interesting and lively conversations took place in lessons where teachers' astute questions ensured that pupils thought about their learning. 'How many answers do you think you need? Look at the number of question marks I have used in this problem.' Pupils say that teachers, learning support assistants, their friends and 'using their

brains well' all help them to become successful learners. Books and pupils' work seen during the inspection confirm that pupils are exploring mathematics in greater depth, using developing reasoning and problem-solving skills. One pupil, who chose 'challenge 2' during a mathematics lesson, told me 'I struggled a bit yesterday but I want to understand it.'

It is clearly evident that, in English, teachers have high expectations of the very youngest and oldest pupils. Reading and writing in the Reception class are impressive. Children are using their phonic skills well to make sensible guesses at words they read or want to write. The progress in their learning journeys is equally impressive. Pupils in Year 6 are using their experience in reading to influence what they write about, making them 'real' authors. For example, one Year 6 pupil wrote, 'On the edge of a cliff next to the blue, shiny ocean was a tent. But not just any tent. It was a magic tent that could send you to a forest!' Although you have successfully focused on improving phonic outcomes, you agree that the teaching of reading is not yet consistent across the school. Some pupils are, therefore, not making as much progress as they could. This is particularly so for some most-able pupils. You and the new subject leader have recognised the need for a more structured approach to the teaching of reading and have begun to put this, and the new spelling strategy, into place. There has not yet been enough time to see the full impact of this on all pupils' achievement. It is evident, however, that there is the expertise within the school to develop this further, and your evolving links with the local teaching school will undoubtedly benefit teachers and pupils alike.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors take safeguarding very seriously. Relevant checks are made to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children. You have ensured that every member of staff is appropriately trained, including staff who have not long been at the school, to keep pupils safe and to alert you of any concerns they may have. Pupils say that they feel safe and know whom to go to if they have any worries. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and that they should not give out personal details to anyone. This is because you and your staff teach pupils how to keep safe, sometimes using printed information on the subject in English lessons to check on pupils' understanding.

You and your staff are meticulous in recording any incidents of concern and you are tenacious in following up actions with other agencies. You and your special educational needs coordinator take time to develop good partnerships with parents. As a result, parents readily accept support from the many external agencies with which the school has made links. One parent commented, 'The support we have received has been amazing, and still continues.' Attendance of the most vulnerable pupils is improving because you have raised the awareness of the benefits of regular attendance. However, some unauthorised absence for holidays is having an impact on pupils' achievement. You and your governors are determined to take the necessary steps to ensure that unauthorised attendance is tackled effectively. Parents, almost universally, are very happy with the school and the way you and your staff care for their children. One said, 'My daughter loves attending school; her

teachers are fully embracing and nurturing her thirst for learning', a glowing endorsement of the school's ethos.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry to ascertain that the school remained good. The first of these was the progress the school has made since the previous inspection, specifically in maintaining good teaching throughout the school. Despite some recruitment issues, you have ensured that you accept nothing less than good teaching. Where this has not been so, you have taken decisive action and ensured that pupils' outcomes are not affected. As a result, the majority of pupils across the school are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This includes those pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 last year were not what you expected and you were disappointed. Although pupils made good progress from their varying starting points, some did not reach the standards expected of them, particularly in mathematics. The detailed scrutiny that you and your governors did in summer 2016 showed at least three pupils were very near to the threshold. As this cohort was so small, this affected your results considerably. You and your special educational needs coordinator did everything possible to ensure that pupils made as much progress as they were able and were supported in every way possible.
- Books and teaching seen during the inspection confirm that the emphasis you have had on ensuring that pupils' understanding of mathematics is strengthened, is having a positive impact on their outcomes. I saw numerous examples of pupils extending their thinking, accepting challenge and discussing their learning openly with their classmates and adults. As a result, pupils have a much better grasp of how to tackle problems, use their prior learning and use a number of strategies to support their learning. The subject leader works closely with the allocated governor to monitor and evaluate the impact of his actions. It was a delight to see pupils so engaged in their learning, enjoying the challenge and not giving up if they found something 'a bit tricky'.
- You recognise that the teaching of English, particularly reading, is not yet consistent across the school. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development in the Reception class is above the national average. They have a good grasp of early reading and writing and are well prepared for Year 1. As a consequence, phonics outcomes in Year 1 since 2015 have increased and are now above the national average. Although teachers' assessment shows that most pupils' progress is good in reading, it is evident that some pupils are not achieving as well as they could. This is particularly so for those most able pupils. One pupil, for example, told me 'I need to change this book as I am bored with it!' Another young pupil animatedly told me that she was reading a Jane Austen book at home. The book she was reading in class and the level of challenge being offered to her belied her obvious ability.
- You have already put much in place to develop English this year. All classes have regular guided reading sessions. However, in two classes this is not yet ensuring

that all pupils are actively engaged in reading or writing activities that develop their skills and understanding during these sessions. You have also identified that pupils are not achieving as well in spelling and handwriting as they should. A new spelling strategy has been implemented. However, the impact cannot be seen yet. The English subject leader has ensured that handwriting is taught at least three times a week. Although teachers are giving pupils the opportunity to practise their handwriting, the quality is not yet good enough in most classes. You recognise that it is now time to ensure that teachers fully understand the implications of pupils not writing legibly and spelling accurately.

- The second key line of enquiry related to the previous inspection and to how well subject leaders have been developed. You have had several changes in leadership of subjects since 2013. You have put in place subject leader files so that new leaders can pick up quickly from where their predecessor left. You have ensured that monitoring is undertaken regularly by subject leaders and that this feeds into governors' reports and the school improvement plan. Your leadership and expertise, and those of your special educational needs coordinator and mathematics lead, are very much welcomed by staff. You all provide a good role model for younger and less experienced members of staff. The green shoots of this are beginning to show. Areas such as geography, history, art and science are being well developed through interesting and innovative topics. The work seen in pupils' topic books was testament to how well you have all concentrated on developing links between one subject and another. However, sometimes the link between standards and the responsibilities of subject leadership is still not as strong as it needs to be, which was discussed with your leaders during my visit. The potential for rapid improvement, however, is clearly evident.
- Another key line of enquiry related to how well governors hold leaders to account for standards in the school, particularly those achieved by the most vulnerable pupils. The discussion I had with your governors demonstrated to me that they know the school well, its strengths and areas of development, and how best to continue to improve. Governors work very well with the staff, regularly visiting and supporting subject leaders in their work, monitoring standards as they go. The minutes of governing body meetings show that governors are tenacious and astute. They are not afraid to challenge leaders and leaders respond with robust evidence. The impact of additional funding to support the most vulnerable pupils is well evaluated across the school. The progress that the vast majority make both academically and, particularly, socially and emotionally, is considerable, as could be seen in the various pupils we discussed.
- My last key line of enquiry related to the attendance of some pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In 2015, some of these pupils were in the lowest 10% of the country for attendance. Some pupils' persistent absence was in the highest 10% of the country in 2016. We discussed at length the reasons for some of the absence. It was apparent that a number of families are taking unauthorised leave for holidays. The governors take an appropriately hard line with this and have begun proceedings to fine parents who take their children out of school during term time. It was evident from assessment information we looked at and pupils' books,

that pupils' progress is undoubtedly affected by such periods of absence, especially that of pupils who are the most vulnerable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of pupils' skills in English and mathematics are consistently high in all areas of the curriculum
- the teaching of reading is consistent across the school and ensures that all pupils, particularly the most able, make good progress from their starting points
- leadership of curriculum areas continues to develop so that new or inexperienced leaders fully understand the part they play in raising standards of achievement
- attendance of some of the most vulnerable pupils continues to improve.

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

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, and the subject leader for English to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I undertook observations of learning in all classes with you, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I also listened to pupils read during my time in lessons, and talked to them about their reading. I held meetings with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a group of pupils. Together with the English and mathematics subject leaders, we scrutinised pupils' work in their English and topic books and looked at the school's own assessment information. I examined a range of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement and records of behaviour. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and records, the checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. I took into account the 16 parent responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 14 text messages from parents.