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Mrs Lynne Bailey  
Headteacher  
St Mark's Church of England Junior School  
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Gloucestershire  
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Dear Mrs Bailey

### **Short inspection of St Mark's Church of England Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 July 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 April 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 tackled all of the areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection with rigour. For example, through high-quality teaching and guidance by staff, pupils acquire a range of effective learning skills. As a result, they are able to successfully complete their work independently and with increased confidence.

Your passion, enthusiasm and energy to ensure that pupils receive a high-quality education in a nurturing and caring environment is demonstrable. You have high expectations of yourself and staff to provide pupils with the very best quality of education, support and guidance. Indeed, you are a leader who is described as 'inspirational' and who 'runs a tight ship'. You are not complacent and are constantly striving to improve the school further. For example, you were disappointed in the dip in mathematics outcomes for Year 6 pupils in 2016. As a result, you have taken action to ensure that this is not repeated. Current information confirms that pupils are making good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics.

You are ably supported by your senior leaders, who share your vision for the school to be the very best. You, your senior leaders and the governing body possess a clear knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and are fully aware of what needs to improve. For example, further work needs to be undertaken to embed the changes you have made in tracking pupil progress across all subjects,

especially for those pupils who are working at greater depth. In addition, you know pupils are not yet making the very best progress across a wider range of subjects to match the strong progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school's values of friendship, achievement, commitment and enjoyment, known as FACE, are palpable throughout the school. During the inspection, laughter and fun permeated the school, with pupils demonstrating their love of learning. This was exemplified in the Greek day for Year 5 pupils. The wide range of experiences such as food tasting, Greek writing and cooking ignited their enthusiasm and desire to learn.

The overwhelming majority of parents are highly supportive of the school. Typically, those who responded to the online survey, spoke to me or wrote state that their children are well looked after, taught well, behave well and that the school is well led and managed. They speak highly of the support and guidance they receive from staff. Comments such as, 'outstanding school under outstanding headteacher', 'We love St Marks it is a fabulous school' and 'I have nothing but praise for this school' are just a few of the many positive comments made by parents.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe; the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring that pupils make good progress, especially the most able; the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting pupils' academic and personal development; and the action leaders have taken to diminish the differences between girls' and boys' achievement. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, other leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders work closely with a range of external agencies and decisive action is taken when required to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

You make sure that all staff receive high-quality training. Staff, irrespective of their role, are trained well in all aspects of safeguarding such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, and extremism and radicalisation. This enables staff to quickly identify concerns and take brisk action with confidence.

The school's systems to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils meets requirements. Leaders and governors understand the importance of safer recruitment. This ensures that all staff are carefully checked before they commence employment to confirm that they are suitable to work with children.

Staff foster tremendously positive and trusting relationships with pupils. The many pupils spoken to during the inspection report that they are happy and feel extremely safe in school. They know that they are able to share any concerns or worries with a member of staff and they will be sorted without delay. For example, they describe

how the 'worry box' is a highly effective form of communication where they can write their concern, knowing that rapid action will be taken by an adult to resolve their worry.

Parents are extremely confident that their children are kept safe and are exceptionally well looked after while in school. 'The lovely, happy, caring atmosphere is just what children need to feel safe and secure' and 'an amazing school, they look after my children so well' are two of the many positive comments parents expressed during the inspection.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, your staff and governors are highly ambitious for the school. You share the determination to drive forward improvements. Therefore, the capacity of the school remains strong.
- You and your senior leaders monitor the quality of provision to ensure that teaching and learning is consistently strong. You provide high-quality support and guidance to staff, which is carefully aligned with their professional development. Nevertheless, you and your governors would not hesitate in tackling underperformance if staff do not meet your exacting expectations. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time is consistently good.
- Pupils are making good progress in mathematics as a result of good teaching. Careful analysis by leaders in evaluating the impact of teaching ensures that activities planned meet the needs of pupils more precisely. Staff training has increased their confidence in the delivery of the mathematics curriculum, especially in challenging the most able pupils. For example, the most able pupils are made to think deeply in the approaches they use to solving complex mathematical problems. They are able to explain confidently their reasoning for the methods they use, demonstrating resilience and determination in their work. Consequently, these pupils achieve well in their mathematics.
- Pupils receive a rich and varied curriculum which is enhanced by the many extra opportunities you provide. Pupils spoke with delight to the inspector about the variety of activities afforded to them through the FACE time, such as music, art, drama and sport. Trips to fire pupils' enthusiasm in their learning are carefully planned, for example trips to the Black Country Museum as part of the Year 5 topic on the industrial revolution. Such trips inspire pupils and bring their learning to life.
- You carefully ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. However, work viewed in books confirms that pupils' writing across the curriculum does not match the quality evident in their work in English. Curriculum leaders have established the key assessment criteria for each subject but you are aware that this needs embedding to ensure that pupils make as much progress as possible across a wider range of subjects.
- Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. You have created a caring and nurturing environment where pupils can thrive. Staff know each pupil well and are aware of their differing needs. Pupils have the opportunity to access

mindfulness sessions to provide them with techniques to keep themselves well mentally and emotionally. Where identified, you seek guidance and support beyond the school to ensure that pupils receive the best support at times of need.

- You have successfully diminished the differences between girls' and boys' achievement. This is because you have carefully monitored and analysed how girls learn best and provide activities which meet their specific learning styles. Progress information shows that there is no discernible difference between girls and boys in reading, writing or mathematics.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' written work in other subjects is of the same high quality as in their work in English
- key assessment criteria are embedded in each subject to enable pupils to make the best progress across a wider range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and your senior leaders. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. I carried out a 'learning walk' through classes, accompanied by yourself or your deputy headteacher. I held discussions with seven governors, and held meetings with other members of staff. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority. I talked with a group of pupils to gather their views.

I looked at a wide range of documentation. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plan and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour and safeguarding were also carefully checked.

I spoke with parents and took into account other correspondence received during the inspection. I considered the 64 responses to Ofsted's online survey, 'Parent View', and 58 free-text messages were also taken into account.