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Mrs Patricia Wilkie
Headteacher
Layer-de-la-Haye Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Wilkie

Short inspection of Layer-de-la-Haye Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. It was clear in our discussions that you and other leaders, including governors, have high expectations of pupils and are ambitious for the school to be the best that it can be. Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused well on continuing to raise the achievement of pupils. This work has had particularly positive impact on improving the progress and attainment of the most able pupils in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. In addition, you and your staff have worked successfully to improve the standard of writing. Displays around the school exemplify the high quality of writing that pupils produce. Pupils' English books in Years 5 and 6 in particular show strong development of written work. Children in early years are also making very good progress in developing their writing skills.

The school now makes better use of assessment information to check how well pupils are working. Class teachers and leaders know which pupils need additional support to enable them to achieve well. The information on pupils' progress and standards of attainment is used effectively to identify what the school needs to improve. For example, there has been a focus on raising the number of children in early years and pupils in key stage 1 who achieve the higher standard.

Under your leadership, the school has worked hard and effectively to improve its

links with parents so that they have a better understanding of their children's progress. This was an issue at the time of the previous inspection. Parents are very complimentary about the school and how it supports their children and nurtures their education.

Pupils are very positive about school and enjoy all it has to offer. They thrive in the warm, positive and caring ethos that you and your staff have created. All parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, and those I spoke to at the start of the school day, said how happy their children are to come to school. This is reflected in pupils' high levels of attendance. You ensure, in the very few cases where pupils' attendance is below average, that you work to improve attendance on an individual basis. Parents and pupils are pleased with the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Pupils are very keen to learn and to do well. They pay attention in lessons and work willingly and enthusiastically with one another. In discussion, they are articulate, thoughtful and respectful. Pupils' conduct around the school is of a high standard.

Since the previous inspection, you have led the school well through changes in the national curriculum. You have focused well on developing pupils' depth of understanding across the full range of subjects they are studying. Pupils now have more opportunities to explain their reasoning and how they have arrived at particular conclusions. This was an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. However, there is more work to do to ensure that pupils' reasoning is consistently accurate or shows a wide enough understanding of the subject matter, especially in science. While the most able pupils have performed very well in the tests at the end of key stage 2 over the last two years, in reading and mathematics especially, middle-ability pupils did not do as well last year as the year before in reading and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school takes good care of pupils. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Almost all parents responding to the Ofsted questionnaire, and all those I spoke to at the start of the school day, agreed that the school keeps pupils safe.

Staff know and understand the range of safeguarding issues they need to guard against and they are vigilant. Teaching staff help pupils to learn about how to keep safe, including when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- I followed a number of lines of enquiry, one of which was focused on key stage 1 and the extent to which expectations were high enough, especially of middle-attaining pupils and the most able. This is because comparatively few pupils attained the greater depth standard in the 2016 and 2017 national tests, given their above-average performance at the end of Reception. The school's data indicates that this is improving and more pupils in the current key stage 1 are on track to achieve the higher standard.
- Stronger teaching in early years led to more children exceeding a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year in 2017. Hence, they are entering key stage 1 with a good foundation to help their learning at the greater depth standard. A new approach to transition from early years to Year 1 is intended to support personal development and readiness for the greater demands at this key stage. Senior leaders are keeping a check on the impact of this initiative.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the progress of middle-attaining pupils across key stage 2. This was because the test results for 2017 indicate that middle-ability pupils in last year's Year 6 did not make as much progress across the key stage as did the most able. Inspection findings indicate that these pupils are currently making good progress in both English and mathematics. However, in mathematics and science, pupils do not always understand key ideas or how to explain them. The use of 'challenges' to extend pupils' thinking often works well, but teachers do not consistently pick up on pupils who have answered the extension question incorrectly or only partially.
- I was interested to find out how effectively you and other leaders evaluate the impact you are having on the achievement of different groups of pupils. You produce an analysis of assessment information for different groups to check impact. In addition, it is clear that you check assessment information with care and look at the progress over time and attainment of individual pupils. Your knowledge of each pupil is impressive. It is clear that you use this information to identify the support that you need to put in place for those who are not working at the right level and that you then check the impact of this support.
- The report on the impact of the school's spending of the pupil premium grant is not as thorough as it could be. For example, the report looks at the progress disadvantaged pupils make, and compares it with the progress of others, but does not identify how well differences in attainment are diminishing. This limits the amount of useful information leaders, including governors, gain from the report.
- Finally, I looked at how well subjects across the curriculum are promoting pupils' achievement. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English and to apply their mathematical skills appropriately in subjects such as geography and science. Planning across the curriculum focuses well on the progressive development of skills in different subjects as pupils move through the school.
- Books show that pupils are making mostly good progress across the wider curriculum. In history in key stage 2 particularly, the level of challenge helps

pupils to develop deeper understanding of the subject. They are given opportunities to apply their historical knowledge in additional and extension tasks. Pupils' exercise books show that work in other subjects, especially in key stage 1, is not as consistently challenging as in history. In key stage 2, pupils are not asked routinely enough to apply their learning in subjects such as geography, science and religious education.

- The higher level teaching assistants who are teaching, and largely leading, art, computing, design and technology, French, music and religious education are developing these subjects well. They have identified areas for development this year, based on useful reviews of the progress made over the last year, in order to build on the success to date and further improve the quality of pupils' work and depth of thinking.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- identify ways of checking pupils' understanding of ideas in mathematics and science in order to correct any misconceptions, develop their reasoning skills and improve their depth of learning
- ensure that tasks across the wider curriculum, especially in key stage 1, are consistently purposeful and challenging
- improve reporting on the use of the pupil premium grant so that the effectiveness of spending is analysed more fully.

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

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and agree the key lines of enquiry. In addition, I held meetings with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, three higher level teaching assistants and members of the senior leadership team. I also telephoned the local authority officer attached to the school. As part of the inspection, I looked at a variety of documents and records, including your self-evaluation summary, the school improvement plan and the school's assessment information. I also scrutinised 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 and behaviour. We jointly undertook observations across the school and talked to pupils about their learning. I looked at pupils' written work from the last academic year. I observed pupils around the school and held a discussion with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6. Finally, I spoke to a number of parents as they dropped their children off at school and took into account the 55 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.