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Dear Mrs Hunter

Short inspection of Walsham-le-Willows Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 previous inspection.

You have successfully led the school as it expanded from being a first school into a primary school. You understand the challenges that the changes can present and have rightly identified that there is work to do to make the school even better. You have embraced and built upon the support provided by the local authority by effectively creating a culture in which all staff share responsibility for improving outcomes for all pupils at the school.

Teachers and support staff have responded positively to the challenge of raising expectations. The responses to the staff questionnaire confirm that staff feel that they are part of a team and that their contributions are valued. Teachers are held to account for the progress that pupils make, but they also know that you will support them in undertaking high-quality training to help them to improve their work.

Pupils are very proud of their school. Pupils said that everyone is made welcome because, as one pupil told me, 'It is like one big family here.' Pupils have access to enriching learning experiences through the vibrant and well-designed curriculum. The school has successfully achieved many awards, including the religious education gold quality mark, the eco green flag, the silver primary science award and the silver linguamarque award for language teaching.

Effective links between all subjects provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to use and apply the skills they have been taught in mathematics and English. Leaders have correctly identified that pupils' achievement in writing is not yet what it should be in key stage 2. This is because the new strategies to improve the teaching of spelling and handwriting have not yet had time to improve pupils' outcomes.

Governors share your desire to improve the school further. A change in membership of the governing body has strengthened governors' ability to undertake more strategic roles. School leaders are supported and challenged with increased effectiveness.

An area for development identified at your previous inspection was to use information and communication technology across more subjects. The improvements made are evident in pupils' high-quality work on display across the school, which shows the computing skills applied by pupils in various subjects. Additionally, 'digital literacy' is included in all teachers' planning. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their use of technology. They were able to give examples of how they apply their skills, including, for example, making video diaries.

In the previous inspection, you were tasked with sharing the existing outstanding practice and accelerating the progress of the most able pupils. In response to this, leaders have created many opportunities for staff to work more closely together on improving the outcomes, including joint planning across mixed-age year groups and team teaching. Teaching staff have also visited other schools to observe outstanding practice. External advisers and consultants have worked alongside the whole team, sharing ways to improve teaching and learning, particularly for the most able in mathematics.

Detailed, precise school assessment records show that the most able pupils are making good and often better progress than other pupils, across a range of subjects and across key stages 1 and 2. The most recent 2017 key stage 1 assessments show that the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average. However, the progress of the most able girls in mathematics was lower than expected in 2017. You have made the progress of the most able pupils a top priority and have taken decisive action to accelerate progress in mathematics across the whole school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records of concerns are well organised and accurate. You have established a strong culture of safeguarding pupils whereby all staff are well aware of what they should do if they have any concerns. Your procedures for vetting and checking new members of staff are rigorous. Staff training is comprehensive and up to date. When necessary, you work effectively with external agencies to support your pupils' needs.

Pupils of all ages told me that they feel safe at school, and parents agreed. Pupils know whom to go to if they have any concerns. Pupils spoke confidently about how to stay safe on the internet and out of school. Pupils have a good awareness of different forms of bullying. They told me that bullying is a rarity and your records confirm that you have very few instances of bullying.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry I had was exploring how effective teachers are in challenging pupils, particularly girls, to achieve the highest standards in mathematics and make good progress from their starting points. This was because progress in mathematics has been slow across key stage 2 for the past two years.
- The leader of mathematics is very passionate about the subject and leads by example in promoting improved outcomes for pupils. The implementation of the revised curriculum has been managed effectively through staff training, coaching and adapting the school's chosen approaches to promote reasoning and problem-solving skills. Pupils have more challenging activities and are acquiring the higher-order skills needed to master complex concepts. Pupils across the school have benefited from the changes, with the result that pupils are now making good and better progress from their starting points.
- The progress that girls make in mathematics across key stage 2 has been slower than that of boys. Leaders have responded by changing the way that mathematics is taught, with a focus on raising pupils' confidence in learning mathematics, especially for girls. For example, visitors who work in scientific and mathematical jobs come into school to share their experiences and girls are encouraged to attend clubs focusing on the trickiest concepts. Girls report that they now enjoy learning mathematics. However, you recognise that there is still further work to do in raising confidence and ensuring that the girls are fully engaged in all mathematics activities.
- I had a line of enquiry focused on the curriculum. Given the increase in pupil numbers, I explored how well the curriculum is planned to meet the needs of pupils in mixed-aged classes.
- The school has given a great deal of time and thought to developing a curriculum that is engaging as well as challenging. There are a number of good opportunities to extend learning, including a trip to France and outdoor learning activities.
- Joint planning across classes ensures that pupils have access to a range of topics that allows them to build upon and consolidate their knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of subjects. Consequently, pupils are making better progress from their varying starting points. However, the lack of a sound grasp of the more technical aspects of writing, particularly spelling and handwriting, is still preventing some pupils from achieving even better outcomes in key stage 2.
- During this inspection I looked at how the school identifies and meets the needs of specific groups of pupils, for example those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils. This was because

outcomes for these groups of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 were much lower than in previous years.

- I found that teachers have been successful at developing and adapting their teaching to ensure that they meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Pupils who have (SEN) and/or disabilities, and those that are disadvantaged, have individualised support plans that are closely monitored. Additional adults support teaching well and make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- The final line of enquiry was to look at the progress of children from the early years to the end of key stage 1. I wanted to check how children who do not reach a good level of development are supported to catch up to achieve well by the time they reach the end of key stage 1.
- Leaders have sought and acted upon external advice to improve outcomes for children in the early years. Teachers have adapted and improved the curriculum so that it more closely matches the needs of the children and allows them to develop good early literacy and numeracy skills. The actions taken have led to improved outcomes for children. In 2017, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was above the national average.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, has been a focus for improvement. A legacy of weak phonics teaching contributed to poor spelling skills throughout the school. Leaders have introduced changes, which focus teaching and adapt the curriculum so that it is the same for Year 1 pupils in both classes. Staff have also involved parents more than before in helping with their reading and spelling. A suitably precise and targeted approach to the teaching of phonics has resulted in a big increase in the number of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1. It has also improved spelling outcomes at the end of key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- girls across the school make consistently good progress in mathematics by raising their confidence to engage in all mathematical activities
- the teaching of spelling and handwriting, and high expectations of presentation are consistent across key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Chaplin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the teacher responsible for mathematics. I also met with governors, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority.

A range of evidence was gathered to judge the impact of the work of school leaders. This included joint observations of the quality of learning and assessment, and talking to pupils about their learning. I scrutinised samples of pupils' current work across subjects and across a wide range of abilities. I also reviewed samples of work from last year.

I spoke with pupils informally during lessons, and formally during an interview. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school at the start of the school day and during lessons.

The 20 responses to the Ofsted free-text service, 27 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey were taken into account to gain views about the school's work. There were no responses to the pupil survey so I looked at the school's records of pupils' responses to a range of topics.

I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, the single central record of employment checks and behaviour policies. I scrutinised the latest achievement information for the school, the school's self-evaluation summary and improvement plan, records of meetings of the governing body, and information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.