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Mrs Karen Cayford  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Cayford

### **Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 restored, and is now building rapidly upon, the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Governors and staff told me how, since your appointment in September 2015, you have brought stability, provided clear, decisive leadership and instilled a culture of high expectations. All staff who completed the online survey agreed the school is led and managed well and that they are proud to work at the school. The many staff I spoke with on the day of the inspection echoed these sentiments. Comments such as 'she has high expectations of us, the children and herself' and 'she has included us all on the journey of improvement' were typical of views expressed.

Very many parents expressed positive views about the quality of education provided, commenting on the improved organisation and open, caring approach evident at St Mary's. The comment made by one parent that they are 'impressed by how they [the staff] are working together and inspiring learning' was endorsed by inspection evidence.

On your appointment, you considered the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and that of leadership and management not to be of the standard you expected or that you considered pupils deserved. With the strong backing of governors, you have supported and challenged leaders, some who are new to their role, to 'step up to the plate' and they have responded well. Senior leaders and subject champions (subject leaders) willingly share your passion for school

improvement and are increasingly skilled in bringing it about. There is ample evidence of the impact of their work in the rapid and sustained improvement in the quality of provision in the early years. It can also be seen in the impressive progress made by pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Correctly, you have set about ensuring that all leaders in foundation subjects replicate the best practice evident in the school.

You have made clear your high expectations for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and manage staff performance well. You have ensured that leaders of English and mathematics have a precise understanding of pupil progress and that external experts validate these leaders' judgements. Through your chosen approach of 'child-led monitoring' you and your senior team have a detailed understanding of the standard of teaching, its impact on learning and the accuracy of teachers' assessments. You have not been afraid to challenge weaker practice and have done so effectively. Teachers and teaching assistants speak highly of the support and training they are provided with. The impact of your actions is evident in the improving quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupil achievement, in particular, in the early years and key stage 2.

You are rightly proud of the developments that have taken place in the early years provision. Due to strong leadership and effective teaching, children develop quickly into enthusiastic and increasingly independent learners. Children make full use of the well-resourced learning environment and do so cooperatively and with good humour. They are proud of, and eager to talk about, their work. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been rising and in 2017 was above the national average. Children are prepared well for key stage 1.

St Mary's is a harmonious school in which pupils are able to thrive in their learning and play. It is clear that pupils' pride in their school, their positive, courteous behaviour and enjoyment of learning noted at the time of the previous inspection remain. Pupils told me how much they like learning, enjoy each other's company and appreciate the care shown to them by staff. Pupils' positive behaviour demonstrates that the school values of respect, care and self-control are well known and understood. For example, pupils told me how they 'learn to respect other people' at school and that it 'would not be fair not to know about other people's beliefs'. Leaders rightly take appropriate action to ensure that pupils' attendance and levels of punctuality remain high. Pupils attend school regularly, bearing out the views expressed by adults that leaders' changes have made 'school a place pupils want to be'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your leaders and the governors place pupils' safety and well-being at the centre of your work. Pupils told me they feel safe. Their sense of security and well-being is evident in the confidence with which they conduct themselves. The overwhelming majority of parents agree their children are safe, happy and well cared for at St Mary's.

Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training each year and regular updates in staff meetings. They are alert to their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and explained to me signs that indicate a pupil may be vulnerable or at risk of harm. Staff told me they have faith that issues they report are dealt with swiftly and well. Evidence from well-kept school records endorses their views. Leaders take appropriate and timely action to ensure that pupils receive the support they need.

Pupils know what bullying is and struggled to recall any incidents that have taken place at their school. They told me that they are confident that were any issues to occur, adults would deal with them well. Pupils also explained how, through a range of activities, they are provided with appropriate knowledge and strategies to keep themselves safe.

You and governors are proactive in ensuring that school safeguarding records are well kept and, importantly, the knowledge learned in training is refreshed. For example, through your regular 'spot checks' of staff's awareness of safeguarding procedures you ensure that pupils' safety is at the forefront of each adult's mind.

### **Inspection findings**

- My initial line of enquiry was to explore the progress pupils make in their writing, especially at key stage 2. This was because, while pupils made significantly better progress than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics in 2017, this was not the case in writing.
- Through your accurate self-evaluation you correctly identified pupils' writing as an area for development. Your leader of English has led training and developments in the teaching of writing for all staff. Inspection evidence confirms teachers' views that this work has provided them with 'a good framework to teach well'. Teachers, including those new to the school, are more confident and skilled in the planning and implementation of activities that improve pupils' writing skills.
- Evidence in pupils' books, including those who are disadvantaged, demonstrates the positive impact of these changes. Pupils are making good progress in their writing. They present their writing carefully and neatly. Pupils form letters increasingly well and make rapid progress in handwriting, quickly developing confidence in their cursive writing. Pupils' spelling and grammar are also improving as teachers have made this a clearer focus of their work.
- Pupils are provided with many opportunities to apply their literacy skills in their English lessons. Together, we saw examples of pupils' well-constructed creative, descriptive and non-fiction writing. Pupils showed me how they are able to edit their work and make improvements to their writing.
- Most-able pupils are responding well to teachers' raised expectations of what they are capable of achieving. I saw examples of most-able pupils' well-structured and increasingly sophisticated writing about topics such as evolution and people in history. Pupils told me how much they enjoyed this aspect of their work, explaining that 'challenges help us improve our learning'.

- In some subjects, such as religious education and history, pupils are provided with activities that enable them to practise and develop their literacy skills. When they have these opportunities, pupils respond very well. However, in some classes, pupils are offered fewer chances to apply their literacy skills across the curriculum. This restricts their progress in subjects such as science.
- My second line of enquiry was to examine the progress pupils make across key stage 1. This was because in 2016 and 2017, pupils' attainment was broadly similar to that of other pupils nationally by the end of key stage 1. In 2017, the proportions of pupils achieving greater depth in each subject was lower than national averages.
- The sustained improvements seen in other areas of the school have not been as clearly evident in key stage 1 in previous years. Pupils have not previously built upon the excellent foundations provided in the early years to the extent they should have. This is now changing.
- The key stage 1 leader, working alongside leaders of mathematics and English, is taking appropriate action to bring about necessary improvements in teaching. Through a well-judged programme of training, team teaching and systematic monitoring, provision is improving. Pupils in key stage 1 are now making improved progress because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is better.
- Teachers in key stage 1 are increasingly skilled at providing work that is matched well to pupils' needs and capabilities. Consequently, many pupils are acquiring the literacy and numeracy skills they need to make good or better progress. You acknowledge there remains more to do to ensure that provision, including for the most able pupils, in key stage 1 is as effective as that which exists elsewhere in the school.
- My final line of enquiry to ascertain if the school continued to provide good-quality education was to establish whether pupils make similar progress in other subjects as they do in English and mathematics.
- Evidence in pupils' books and from the displays of their current work in each classroom and corridor bears witness to the diverse and interesting curriculum pupils have access to. Pupils told me how much they enjoyed learning in art, design, computing, history, physical education, religious education and science. They also talked about the wide range of activities they have experienced and the skills they have acquired.
- Pupils typically make good progress across a range of subjects and year groups. They respond well to tasks that enable them to apply their literacy, numeracy, creative and investigative skills. However, in some classes, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve across the curriculum are not as universally high as they are for English and mathematics.
- The school's foundation subject champions are passionate about their subjects and have a good understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the subjects for which they are responsible. You have rightly identified that these leaders do not yet consistently use pupil progress information to ensure that all groups, for example most-able pupils, make the

higher rates of progress of which they are capable.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements being made to the quality of provision in key stage 1 are accelerated so more pupils, including those who are most-able, make good or better progress
- teachers in all classes have the same high expectations of what pupils can achieve across all subjects and plan learning that enables pupils to achieve their best
- subject champions' precise monitoring of pupil progress, which is evident in English and mathematics, is replicated in each subject across the curriculum.

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

John Lucas

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- I held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, leaders' evaluation of the quality of education, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.
- Documents such as the school's improvement plans, leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, policies and the pupil premium report were analysed and discussed with you and other senior leaders and subject champions. The school's safeguarding arrangements, records, files and documentation were also examined.
- Together with you and your assistant headteacher I observed pupils learning in each class. We looked at examples of children's and pupils' work to explore the progress pupils are making over time.
- I met with almost all teachers and teaching assistants present on the day of the inspection.
- I spoke with a group of 10 pupils formally, and also with many others informally during lessons and lunchtime, regarding their learning.
- I met with the chair of governors and three other governors.
- I considered the views of parents I spoke with at the start of the school day as well as those 59 parents who responded to Parent View. I also took account of the views of nine staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire.