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Mr Mark Cobbold  
Headteacher  
St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School  
Back Hills  
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Suffolk  
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Dear Mr Cobbold

### **Short inspection of St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 October 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership team understand how well the school is doing and what needs to be done next. You provide clear direction and this provides a strong sense of purpose, which motivates staff and pupils to achieve well. Parents and staff alike recognised the good quality of leadership in your school. There is a strong sense of teamwork and commitment among staff.

You and your staff have created a warm and welcoming school where pupils' academic and personal development are equally important. Your staff know pupils and their families well. This, together with the high priority given to supporting pupils' personal development and welfare, continues to be a key strength of your school. Parents are very positive and expressed appreciation for the support given to their children. Pupils and staff have very positive relationships.

During the previous inspection, many strengths were identified in your school: the good start that children make in Reception class; the good provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; and the knowledge and commitment to improvement demonstrated by your governors. These remain strengths.

You continue to ensure that a topic-based curriculum, together with a range of high-quality enrichment experiences, keeps your pupils interested and motivated. For example, pupils are motivated by having a degree of choice over the wider projects they can take part in and their home learning.

Pupils have many opportunities to play musical instruments, and there is a popular school choir. The art work produced by pupils around the school is of particularly high quality. For example, pupils made artistic sculptures of polar bears during a topic on the Arctic and built Anglo-Saxon houses in the school grounds as part of a history project.

Close links with partner schools and the local secondary school enable some specialist work in foundation subjects and ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and are very keen to participate in the good range of sporting and physical activities available. Pupils participate in a range of sporting competitions and have achieved some significant successes. They undertake work for a number of charities and the school has an active link with a school in Kenya. Pupils are currently running daily to cover the distance of the journey there, thus raising money while increasing their fitness.

Pupils are polite and well mannered. Pupils are keen to contribute to their school, for example some talked about their responsibilities as sport leaders, digital leaders, buddies to younger pupils and library monitors. Pupils are articulate and express their views and opinions confidently. They listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are positive, as can be seen in their willingness to work together.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on staff prior to taking up appointments. Records are complete and up to date. Staff and governors undertake regular and relevant training.

Any concerns about pupils are raised immediately. You hold regular meetings to share any concerns regarding pupils and this ensures that nothing is overlooked. Although rare, when there has been the need, staff have worked closely with other professionals, such as health and social services, to make sure that pupils are safe and well supported.

Pupils report feeling safe in your school. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk in a range of situations and how to manage this effectively. Pupils relate this to when they are using the internet and know who to speak to if they are concerned. Parents are confident that their children are well looked after. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe at school.

## Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was about the actions that school leaders are taking to ensure that pupils make good progress in writing between key stages 1 and 2. Although pupils in the school achieve as well as pupils nationally by the end of key stage 2, the progress they make from key stage 1 in writing is not as strong as in reading and mathematics. I investigated why the very good test results in grammar, spelling and punctuation were not leading such good outcomes in writing.
- Leaders recognise this and have worked hard to put in place a number of changes. A new approach to teaching writing has been successfully implemented in Years 5 and 6 and as a result pupils' work in these year groups is showing strong progress. This approach is now being rolled out into Years 3 and 4 and is encouraging pupils to focus on crafting good-quality writing. Teachers use materials which really interest the pupils as a starting point for their writing and this is helping them to write longer, more interesting pieces.
- Teachers demonstrate what a good piece of writing looks like and how writers select their words and compose their texts, which is helping pupils to understand how to write well themselves. This is now being very closely linked to applying pupils' strong grammar knowledge.
- Leaders have introduced a clear set of non-negotiable expectations for each year group which pupils are referred to regularly by their teachers and this is helping to ensure that pupils constantly move forward.
- In the early years and key stage 1, the school continues to offer lots of opportunities for pupils to develop their writing. Lower key stage 2 teachers are now working hard to ensure that pupils build on these early successes.
- Leaders have made good use of opportunities to work with partner schools to develop teachers' skills and to ensure that their assessments of writing are accurate. The school now has a trainee moderator among the staff who can share this expertise. Leaders and teachers regularly analyse school assessment information in order to provide tailored help for pupils.
- Senior and middle leaders regularly check pupils' books to ensure that the agreed non-negotiables are in place and that the school's feedback policy is being consistently applied. Other teachers also take part in this work to share good practice.
- During the inspection, I looked at pupils' writing with leaders and saw that it is progressing well as they move through the school. There is clear evidence of pupils improving their work as a result of feedback from their teachers and each other. The school's policy for feedback is being applied consistently to pupils' writing. Pupils are keen to improve their writing and present it well.
- In subjects other than English, pupils have some opportunities to write at length, however, this is not consistent in all subjects. Consequently, the benefits of reinforcing and practicing skills being learned in English are not maximised.
- Pupils correct spellings when these are brought to their attention by teachers but this is not consistent. Pupils do not always check their own writing and therefore

sometimes make careless or repeated errors.

- My second line of enquiry was to ascertain if the teaching of phonics is good. I looked at this because the phonics screening check results for Year 1 in 2017 were lower than the national average.
- Leaders put significant staff training in place after the last inspection and this training has recently been refreshed. All teachers and teaching assistants are able to deliver the school's chosen phonics approach accurately and in a lively manner, so that pupils are engaged and make good progress.
- Pupils' learning is checked by the phonics leader regularly and pupils are now more finely grouped so that they are able to work at precisely the right level. The leader is able to adjust the composition of groups to respond quickly if children need extra help or challenge.
- My analysis of assessment information from 2017 shows clearly that despite low outcomes, year 1 pupils made good progress from their starting points. The school's assessment information shows that in Year 2 these pupils are making strong progress and catching up. Pupils are using their knowledge of patterns of letters and sounds to make sense of their reading in class.
- Finally, I looked at whether leaders in the school are doing all that they can to improve attendance for the small number of disadvantaged pupils who miss a significant amount of school time. I concluded that the school leaders are working hard to support this group.
- The school has very clear systems for monitoring and encouraging good attendance. Discussions with pupils confirm this. The pupils are motivated by the encouragements they receive and attendance is now in line with national averages.
- I looked in detail at the specific circumstances of each of the pupils in this group and the actions taken by leaders to improve their attendance and I concluded that the school offers good support for these pupils and works well with their families.
- Pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is used where appropriate to offer individual support, for example offering taxis to make difficult journeys more accessible.
- For many of the pupils, health issues were the reason for lower attendance.
- The school has used the local authority attendance services and legal options where appropriate.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further improve progress in writing by:
  - embedding the chosen teaching methods in lower key stage 2
  - planning more systematically for the teaching and application of writing

skills in foundation subjects

- ensuring a consistent approach to the teaching and correction of spelling
- insisting that pupils always check their work.

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

Susan Sutton  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, parents, governors and pupils.
- I visited all the classrooms and looked at children's work. I observed behaviour around the school.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including governors' documentation, planning, the single central record of employment checks, child protection systems, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information, attendance information and the school improvement plan.
- I took account of the 46 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire and 40 comments from parents by text.