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Mrs Alison Davies
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Davies

Short inspection of Farlow CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 last inspection. In this time, you have continued to work with calm determination to drive the school forward. Staff, pupils and governors all commented on your strong commitment to do the very best for your pupils. You, your staff team and governors have high aspirations for your pupils and you are focused and relentless in that mission.

You, your staff and governors place a clear emphasis on nurturing pupils' wider personal development as well as their academic achievement. One member of staff said, 'Our school allows pupils and staff to flourish and grow, to use their personal strengths and talents and to develop other areas.' The school motto, 'Planting seeds of happiness and achievement. Growing and learning together', reflects this ethos very well. A thorough knowledge of each child enables you all to recognise when further support is required to help pupils achieve well. Parents I spoke to, who have children with complex needs, were full of praise for the way the school is responsive to the needs of their children and continually adapts learning provision to ensure that their children are fully included.

Pupils love the school and are overwhelmingly proud of its strong community spirit. One pupil said, 'Everyone knows each other really well.' As a result, pupils feel valued as individuals. You, your staff and governors fully understand both the strengths and

challenges of small schools. Your aspiration that 'little schools can do big things' is very apparent in all you do. You are very innovative in seeking opportunities for pupils to access experiences from wider sources and to ensure that they receive rich curriculum provision.

The school has a strong Christian ethos and works well in partnership with church members to develop pupils' spiritual and moral well-being. At the time of the last inspection the behaviour and safety of pupils were judged to be outstanding. This has not changed. Pupils behave exceptionally well in school, both in lessons and during less structured times. They are articulate, warm and polite to visitors. They demonstrate courtesy and respect to each other and to all members of staff. They are interested in their learning, demonstrate a strong work ethic and they really appreciate the help and support that staff give them to achieve their best.

Your clear and accurate understanding of the school's areas for development enables you to focus on the right things. The school's development plan identifies the most important priorities. Strategies have been put in place to address these. You have introduced new strategies to teach mathematics and writing, but you recognise that there is further work to be done to ensure that more pupils gain a greater depth in their knowledge of writing and mathematics.

You and your team have taken action to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection. The previous inspection stated that pupils were not being provided with enough opportunities to practise their mental calculation skills and multiplication tables. This has been a focus for the school and pupils are now given sufficient opportunities to develop these basic skills. The inspection report also noted that the pace of learning sometimes slowed as lessons progressed. Through the close monitoring of the quality of teaching and a team approach to improving pace and rigour in teaching, this has been effectively addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors fulfil statutory requirements when appointing new members of staff. All staff have received the relevant and necessary training. Careful records are kept of any training and staff have signed to say they have read documentation and policies. As a result, they know how to recognise signs of neglect or abuse and are very clear about the school's procedures for reporting and recording any concerns they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils.

Parents and pupils feel that the school is a safe place to be. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe. For example, the pupils I spoke to could speak knowledgeably about how to use the internet responsibly and what they should do to ensure their personal safety. They consider bullying and bad behaviour to be rare and they are confident that staff would listen to them and deal effectively with any problems.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection you and I agreed some aspects of the school's work that we would focus the inspection on. The first one was mathematics. I found that pupils had positive attitudes to mathematics and took pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils told me that they felt the work set was at just the right level of challenge. There has been a focus in the school on developing mathematical language and this is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes. You have introduced new teaching strategies to ensure that pupils gain a deep understanding of mathematical concepts and I saw pupils being asked to explain, reason and justify their answers. However, these improvements still need to be built upon and sustained to ensure consistency in the quality of learning for every child.
- To whether that the school remains good, I also considered the quality of writing across the school. Some children start school with a smaller range of vocabulary than might be expected for their age. You work hard to address this through story telling in the younger classes. Looking at their English books, I found that pupils were given many opportunities to write extensively, including opportunities to write in the context of other subject areas. The quality of pupils' writing could be improved further by a greater emphasis from teachers on challenging pupils to make more sophisticated grammar, punctuation and vocabulary choices.
- Pupils get off to a strong start learning phonic sounds. Learning opportunities are well pitched so that pupils make strong progress.
- Given the size and location of the school, another aspect of the school's work we considered was the extent to which Farlow CofE Primary School prepares its pupils for life beyond school and in the wider world. This is a real strength of the school and one that has received careful and strategic planning. The school achieves this in a number of ways. Locally, close links have been formed with other schools so that pupils mix with more children. Links have also been formed with a large multi-ethnic school in London and a school in Tanzania. Pupils have had opportunities to learn about how people live in these very contrasting places. Pupils told me about the visit by two teachers from Tanzania, who talked about how children learn mathematics at their school. They compared it with their own experiences. They also learned some Swahili. Trips play a large part in extending pupils' experiences; for example, pupils have visited different places of faith. The residential trips are highly valued by pupils and parents. These may involve adventurous outdoor activities or be a trip on a train to a city. Visits are also used to extend and stimulate learning, such as the recent trip to the Space Exploratory Centre. Pupils can talk knowledgeably about parts of the world beyond Farlow village. They understand diversity, tolerance and compassion. They are currently fundraising to provide a water tank for their partner school in Tanzania.
- The governing body is knowledgeable about the school because it is kept well informed by leaders. Governors hold senior leaders to account for the impact of their work to effect improvements. They also ensure that leaders are supported and their efforts are appreciated. Governors manage the finance and resources that are available to the school efficiently, ensuring that expenditure is used well to promote learning. An example of this is the appointment of a second teacher in

the key stage 2 class, which has enabled you to really focus your teaching on the pupils in upper key stage 2. The governing body is a single governing body for Farlow CofE Primary School and another local small school. This federation enables leaders to share expertise and provides opportunities for collaborative projects across the schools, such as your work for the John Muir Award, through which pupils study hedgerows as a habitat. Governors believe this adds strength to both schools.

- My discussions with pupils and parents revealed that pupils enjoy coming to school. This is evidenced by their very high rates of attendance. Staff morale is also extremely high. One member of staff said, 'I love working at our little school because it is a friendly and vibrant place to be. I relish the many opportunities I am given to grow into the best teacher I can be.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue focusing on improving teaching and pupils' achievement in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that mathematical concepts are taught to help pupils develop deeper understanding and the skills to justify their mathematical thinking with confidence
 - ensuring that pupils in all year groups have sufficient opportunities to apply their mathematical learning through investigation and problem solving
- continue to improve the quality of writing across the school by challenging pupils to use more sophisticated vocabulary and more accurate grammar and punctuation.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also spoke to a local authority adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look at their books. I looked at an extensive range of current books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I looked at a range of

documentation, including information about safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.