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Mrs Holmes  
Headteacher  
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Mereside  
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Dear Mrs Holmes

### **Short inspection of Mereside Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2018, 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 June 2014.

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

Mereside school has developed further since its last inspection. Pupils' outcomes are improving in every key stage and high-quality staff training is resulting in strong teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have a wide range of skills. They accurately evaluate the effectiveness of their school and are focused on the right priorities. Expectations are very high and pupils' conduct is exemplary. Children's happiness and safety are priorities for governors and leaders. The school's Christian values and commitment to developing the whole child underpin every aspect of the setting.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school. Parents are particularly happy with the quality of daily communication, the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and the care for their child as an individual. Comments from parents include: 'I am very happy with Mereside school. I feel the staff, senior leadership team and the head are extremely caring and work hard to provide a positive environment in which the children are well supported in their learning', and, 'This school is very nurturing and has strong Christian and family values. Every child matters.' These comments were typical of others received from parents during the inspection.

Staff feel very proud to work at the school. Every respondent to Ofsted's staff survey feels that leaders do all they can to ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff.

The governors are talented people and are passionate about the school. They have supported and challenged the school through a journey of rapid improvement. They understand the school's key strengths and weaknesses, and are committed to raising standards even further.

Leaders have transformed assessment systems and the curriculum effectively. As a result of these actions and effective teaching, pupils make good progress by the end of key stage 2.

At the last inspection the school was asked to: improve pupils' achievement in mathematics by ensuring the most able pupils receive the right level of challenge; and build on the improvements made to the quality of teaching by providing ambitious targets and tasks in lessons.

Pupils' achievement in mathematics has risen. Improvements have been secured by providing staff with high-quality training and effective support from the local authority. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress is above that found nationally. Pupils' books show strong rates of progress over time. This is a result of the frequent opportunities pupils have to reason, solve problems and show their mathematical understanding. All pupils are challenged. However, the quality of this challenge can vary. In some mathematics lessons, pupils are moved onto more complex tasks quickly. In others, some pupils spend time completing tasks that are within their capabilities. As a result, though progress is improving over time, there is scope for even better achievement. Staff do not routinely share with one another the effective strategies that are used to secure challenge.

The school development plan focuses on exactly the right priorities. However, some targets lack precision. Leaders establish success criteria but these are not precise enough. Expectations of pupils' progress lack clear milestones that can be monitored fully by staff and governors.

The school is developing rapidly and has a number of key strengths. Strengths include the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' personal development and outcomes. However, to ensure that outcomes are substantial and sustained, leaders and governors acknowledge that gaps in achievement between boys and girls require further monitoring. The punctuality of disadvantaged pupils is not as good as their peers. There is scope for governors to extend their monitoring so that they take greater account of leadership development, compliance of the school's website and target setting. The training needs and professional development of leaders are not set out in a plan that governors can monitor and assess for impact. Though there is a culture of learning and collaboration in the school, teachers do not yet share their best practice widely enough so that the level of challenge for pupils is consistently high.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have created a culture of safeguarding at Mereside. Children's safety is a priority. Leaders are quick to follow up any concerns about children with other

agencies where appropriate. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through the curriculum and can recall important messages about road safety and how to stay safe online.

The quality of record keeping is a particular strength of the school. It is clear to see the actions that leaders take to keep children safe. Above all, staff know pupils exceptionally well. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. There is a clear sense of safety and inclusion in the school.

### **Inspection findings.**

- At the start of the inspection we reviewed the school's overall effectiveness. We discussed the school's key strengths and areas for development. We agreed several key lines of enquiry and inspection activity to ascertain if Mereside remains good and safeguarding is effective. The findings of these activities are outlined below.
- Pupils' overall attendance is in line with the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been low in recent years. This is in part due to pupils arriving late to school. Leaders have identified this as an area for development and therefore monitor attendance and punctuality on a fortnightly basis. Consequently, families are very well known to the school and appropriate strategies are established to secure improvement in attendance and punctuality. There is more work to do in ensuring that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves further and that no learning time is lost.
- At the start of the inspection there were a number of required documents that were missing from the school's website. Leaders and governors have not routinely checked the website's content to ensure that parents are fully informed about aspects of school performance such as the impact of additional funding. However, these shortcomings were quickly addressed by leaders and the website is now compliant.
- Additional funding is being used effectively. By the end of key stage 2 the progress made by disadvantaged pupils is similar to that of other pupils nationally. The school's own assessment information shows that there are no gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers across different year groups.
- Pupils' books show that teachers plan frequent opportunities to develop pupils' mathematical thinking. The development of mathematics has been a focus of school improvement for several years. Effective training and a commitment from staff to develop their practice have resulted in sharp improvements in the quality of teaching and outcomes. However, the level of challenge can vary in lessons and could be greater in some classes. Staff do not routinely share with one another the effective strategies that are used to secure challenge.
- All pupils engage well in their learning. The school has focused on ensuring that boys have exciting tasks that meet their interests and help develop their writing skills well. The school's own assessment information shows that boys and girls make similar rates of progress, but there remain some gaps in the standards that

they reach by the end of key stage 1. These differences are rightly a focus of ongoing school development.

- Outcomes in the early years foundation stage have been in line with national data for several years. The early years leader keeps a close eye on any differences in achievement between different groups. In 2017, although rates of children's progress were similar, there was a marked difference between the attainment of boys and girls in writing. Actions have already been established to diminish any differences between boys' and girls' attainment and must now be monitored and sustained. Parents are very happy with the strong start that children have to their learning at Mereside.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work continues to closely monitor any differences in progress between boys and girls, particularly in the early years and key stage 1
- disadvantaged pupils arrive at school on time
- governors extend their monitoring to take greater account of leadership development, compliance of the school's website and target-setting
- teachers are provided with opportunities to share their best practice more widely so that the overall level of challenge rises further, particularly for the most able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with the leadership team at the start of the inspection to review the school's self-evaluation and development plan.

I observed teaching in six classrooms. Observations were undertaken jointly with leaders. During observations I reviewed learning in pupils' books.

I scrutinised a range of documents throughout the inspection including: risk assessments, child protection files, the single central record, training information, attendance analysis, assessment information, action plans, minutes from meetings

of the governing body, the headteacher's termly reports to the governing body and strategies for the expenditure of pupil premium funding.

I took account of feedback from: 65 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, 36 responses on free text, 66 responses to the pupil survey and 31 responses to the staff survey. I met with parents at the start of the day as pupils arrived at school.

I held a meeting with five members of the governing body including the chair of governors. I met with an adviser from Shropshire's local authority.