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Mrs Emma Edwards
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Rickmansworth
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Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Edwards

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Rickmansworth

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 July 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.

Since the previous inspection, several changes of headteacher, combined with high staff turnover, have proved a barrier to school improvement. On taking up your leadership post in the autumn term, you quickly identified that several aspects of the school's performance needed swift attention. Pupils are not achieving consistently well in reading and writing in key stage 1. You have rightly identified that teaching in English is not routinely informed by a clear understanding of what pupils can already do. As a result, the most able pupils, in particular, are not provided with sufficient opportunity to make the best progress possible. Weaknesses in the quality of teaching of spelling and phonics have also been a key factor. You are taking some well-considered steps to improve the situation. However, it is too early to see a sustained impact on pupils' achievement. You have also identified that improving the quality of the provision in early years is also a pressing priority.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of teaching to help ensure that pupils learn effectively. This remains an area for improvement. Leaders' monitoring and improvement work in mathematics is secure. Leadership of other subjects, including English, is

not so well developed. You are clear that in most cases subject leadership is new. Evidence seen indicates that some pupils are not making the progress that they should in subjects other than English and mathematics such as science. Leaders are currently not well placed to know the extent of this underachievement.

Governors are starting to hold leaders more fully to account than has been the case in recent years. They are gaining a better understanding of pupils' achievement. Governors have clear mechanisms in place to ensure that additional funding is used effectively. However, some aspects of governance require further attention. Governors do not fully understand their responsibilities regarding the public sector equality duty. Pupils learn to respect people regardless of difference. However, pupils have limited opportunities in the curriculum to develop an explicit understanding of the nature of prejudice. Wisely, you are initiating work to resolve this.

Parents and pupils are typically very positive about the school. They value the nurturing community. Pupils behave well and enjoy learning. Parents were quick to praise the quality of communication between school and home. They were confident that any issue of concern will be resolved quickly. Several parents commented on the improvements you have already made and are positive about the quality of leadership you have brought to the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Teachers know the signs to look out for that might suggest that a pupil is at risk. Clear, understood processes are in place for passing on any concerns they may have about the welfare of a pupil.

You provide regular updates to staff so they can ensure that pupils who might be vulnerable are well looked after and supported. When necessary, you communicate and work effectively with other agencies who can provide more specialist support. Your improved communication with families is helping you understand and meet pupils' needs more effectively. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are sound. Governors carry out regular audits and make good use of external verification to confirm that the school's safeguarding arrangements are secure.

Pupils learn to be safe online and in the world around them. Pupils reported that they feel safe and parents agreed.

Inspection findings

- Teaching in English in key stage 1 is not catering well enough for pupils of varying abilities. The level of challenge is not consistently high enough. The most able pupils in particular are not consistently achieving as well as they should. Pupils are not routinely receiving the help they need to spot and correct spelling mistakes. Teachers' expectations of pupils' writing in other subjects is also not consistently high enough. Phonics has not been taught effectively enough in recent times.

Leaders have increased the amount of time pupils spend learning phonics, making sure that it links more clearly with pupils' development of writing skills. This is helping to improve the situation but is yet to have a full impact on pupils' achievement in English.

- Leaders have recently changed the assessment and tracking system to provide a more accurate picture of pupils' progress. They are now better placed to gain a clear understanding of pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. Development of assessment in other subjects is at an early stage. Leaders' understanding of the quality of the curriculum and the extent to which it enables good progress in each subject is not well developed.
- Until recently, leaders' oversight and planning for the use of pupil premium funding has been weak. Wisely, soon after you took up post, you commissioned an external pupil premium review. This has proved very helpful. You have a clear strategy for using the funding, and keeping track of its impact is in place. Governors now have a more effective oversight of this important work and a member of staff has been identified to take a lead role. Less positively, leaders have not included how they will measure the impact on raising pupils' achievement. Also, individual pupils' support plans or 'passports' do not contain targets or show how you will measure the progress that individual pupils make.
- Children in the early years are not making consistently strong progress. Leaders have a clear understanding of where improvements are needed. They are making sure that staff are well supported, including by an expert from the local authority. Recruitment is under way for a new early years leader.
- The school has not published equality objectives in line with the 2011 public sector equality duty. Leaders and governors recognise they have not established a way to evaluate how effective the curriculum provision is in developing pupils' understanding of issues relating to equality and life in modern Britain.
- Pupils are clear that they learn to respect people regardless of difference. However, they reported that they do not have sufficient opportunity in school to deepen their understanding of diversity and stereotyping. You recognise that the school's work to promote equalities is not comprehensive enough. You and one of the governors are booked to attend equality training in the summer term to help move this important issue forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, and particularly the most able, are provided with work that is suitably challenging in all subjects
- effective monitoring, evaluation and assessment is in place for all aspects of the curriculum, enabling continuous improvement
- recently introduced approaches to improve the oversight and effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding are fully implemented and successful
- the school fully complies with the requirements of the public sector equality duty

- the curriculum is consistently effective in developing pupils' understanding of the nature of prejudice, equality and life in modern Britain.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. During the day, I held further discussions with you and met with the four members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I also met with the deputy headteacher and a representative from the local authority. I made short visits to lessons with you to look at pupils' learning in writing and the wider curriculum. We also jointly scrutinised a selection of pupils' work. I talked with parents and pupils and staff. I also took account of 15 staff survey responses and 27 responses to the pupil survey. I also took account of 83 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 36 free-text responses. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures.