

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 March 2018

Mrs Mandy Evans
Headteacher
St John's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Lemsford
Lemsford Village
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 7TR

Dear Mrs Evans

Short inspection of St John's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Lemsford

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They benefit from the highly caring and nurturing environment. Lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils engage in their learning, work hard and make good progress. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and their personal development well catered for. Parents and carers speak highly of the school and all it provides. They value the close links between school and home. Parents of pupils requiring extra support with their learning and development were eager to share their positive experiences.

You acted quickly after the last inspection to rectify weaknesses in teaching in phonics. This is now a clear strength. Leaders' work to improve mathematics has also proved effective. Pupils, including the most able, typically make strong progress.

Teaching of writing is not as consistently strong as teaching in reading and mathematics. A clear, well-thought-through plan is in place to resolve this issue. Leaders are in a strong position to ensure the effectiveness of this plan, building on their previous successes.

Leaders have developed the curriculum beyond English and mathematics in line with the revised national requirements of 2014. However, you recognise that some aspects of the curriculum require attention. Consequently, pupils are not making consistently strong progress across subjects. Your current work to strengthen subject leadership and secure tighter accountability is a step in the right direction to resolving this issue.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on the suitability of staff are rigorous. Records are detailed and of high quality. Parents, pupils and staff agree that the school is a safe place. Leaders and staff keep a caring and watchful eye on pupils. Support is at hand for any pupil who might be vulnerable or at risk. You make sure that staff are fully briefed. They know how and when to refer any safeguarding concerns on to you. When necessary, you work effectively with social services and other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive suitable support. Governors are also fully briefed and trained. Their regular spot checks and use of external audits help to ensure that all arrangements are sound.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have worked effectively to improve the teaching of mathematics. Teachers make good use of assessment and their knowledge of the mathematics curriculum. Pupils consistently engage in work of suitable challenge for their age and ability. An increased focus on mathematical reasoning skills has heightened pupils' confidence and deepened their mathematical understanding. Consequently, pupils, including the most able, typically make strong progress.
- The teaching of writing is not as effective. It is not catering routinely well enough for pupils of different year groups and varying abilities in the same class. As a result, notably fewer pupils make strong progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. You have rightly identified improving this area of teaching as a high priority. Work to bring this about is under way.
- Pupils' progress in other curriculum subjects is also not as consistently strong. Work in pupils' books shows that typically they learn well. However, at times the most able and the older year group in the class do not receive the extra degree of challenge needed to build well on their previous learning. Additionally, aspects of some subjects are not covered well enough. For example, although pupils develop a sound understanding of historical facts, they have limited opportunities to learn to think like historians.
- You have rightly identified developing subject leadership as a priority. Understandably, improving the teaching of mathematics and English has taken priority. Leaders typically undertake more limited monitoring, evaluation and development work in other subjects. You and governors are rightly keen to gain a consistently incisive understanding of the quality of teaching in each subject and use this to inform further improvement. To this end, you recently introduced a requirement for subject leaders to produce regular 'impact reports'. It is too early to judge the success of this initiative.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching of writing routinely provides pupils with the challenge needed to make strong progress from their differing starting points

- teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics enables pupils to consistently build their skills and knowledge from topic to topic so that achievement is outstanding across the curriculum.

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 and the deputy headteacher 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. I met with six members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I also met with other leaders and spoke with staff, pupils and parents. I made short visits to lessons with you to look at pupils' learning in writing and mathematics. I scrutinised a selection of pupils' work jointly with you and the deputy headteachers. I took account of 16 staff survey responses and 43 responses to the pupil survey. I also took account of 71 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 35 free-text responses. I had a short discussion by phone with a representative from the local authority. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures.