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Mrs Angie Hamilton
Executive Headteacher
Erpingham Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hamilton

Short inspection of Erpingham Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together, you have ensured that the issues for improvement from the last inspection have been fully addressed. For example, teachers are consistently using the school's feedback policy. Consequently, pupils are making good progress in writing in English and topic work from their various starting points.

You have successfully reviewed the staffing structure across the federation and, as a result, distribution of staff workload is improving. A concern about workload was raised in the staff online questionnaire. However, at my meeting with staff, we discussed workload and staff understand that you and the governors give as much support as possible. For example, one member of staff said, 'We do have a lot of children with special needs but we work as a team and share this together.' You have rapidly resolved the changes in teacher in upper key stage 2. Consequently, pupils are currently making good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

You have built a strong and effective leadership team who work very successfully together. Subject leaders monitor teaching and learning in their subjects, scrutinise pupils' work, analyse test results and accurately identify areas of strength and where improvements are needed. Improvement points are highlighted in the school improvement plan and all staff work together to make sure that pupils make the best possible progress.

You have recruited a highly effective team of governors, including three former headteachers. Consequently, governors give you and your leadership team effective challenge as well as support to enable further school improvement.

Pupils love their school and all talk with great enthusiasm about the impact of 'forest school' on their well-being. One pupil said, 'You don't have to be boxed in the classroom. You can learn outside as well.'

Parents are very happy with the school and many travel long distances to bring their children to school every day. One parent said: 'I heard about the school through friends. Everyone knows everyone. Both my children are thriving here. I like the focus on outdoor learning.' Other parents talked enthusiastically about the good progress that their children are making and how approachable and friendly the staff are. One said, 'We're kept well informed and can come in at any time to have a chat.'

Although parents are very positive about the school, attendance remains an issue. It is currently just below average. There are reasons for some absences and you and the pastoral team are working effectively with families who find it difficult to get their children to school every day. Although you have robust systems in place to check why pupils are absent, you and the governors recognise that rewards for good attendance are not as effective as they could be.

Safeguarding is effective.

- You have ensured that all safeguarding processes and procedures are fully in place. Staff receive regular training, including discussing how they would manage specific safeguarding issues. Staff are confident about what to do if a pupil has a concern.
- You keep detailed and careful records of contacts with families and with children's social care. You are tenacious in following up referrals and making sure that you get the best outcomes for the most vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils feel very safe at school and said that there is no bullying of any kind. You have a high proportion of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. You have strong and effective systems in place to meet their individual needs. For example, staff are trained in a number of therapies that help pupils successfully overcome their difficulties and make good progress with their learning. One pupil said: 'The teachers listen to you. I can go to an adult at any time if I have a problem. I like the therapy. It lets out the worries because you can put your mind on this and use your imagination.'
- A concern was raised about the security of the school site. You and the governors are aware of this and are working effectively with the local authority to address this issue. The site was fully secure during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was about the teaching of reading in early years and key

stage 1. Since the last inspection, your English leader has reviewed the teaching of reading and has put in place an effective systematic, synthetic approach to teaching phonics. This approach is introduced in pre-school and continued through Reception and key stage 1. Consequently, most children rapidly learn letter sounds and are able to read and write simple sentences by the end of their Reception Year.

- You have a considerable number of pupils who arrive at different times during the school year and into different year groups with no previous school experience. You ensure that these pupils are taught phonics and rapidly become successful readers. I read with several pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read from Reception to Year 3 and they are using their knowledge of phonics well to read unfamiliar words. Your English leader has also put in place a carefully structured phonic reading scheme and pupils do not move on to the next book until they are secure with reading the words in their current reading book.
- My second line of enquiry was focused on how you are improving early years outcomes and in particular helping children to manage their feelings and behaviour. Last year you opened a new pre-school on the school site. This has been highly successful. Children settle in very rapidly because they enjoy the outdoor setting and have strong support from the well-trained manager and staff. Children are not worried about being left by their parents and quickly learn to work together thanks to the exciting and interesting curriculum.
- The early years leader works closely with the pre-school manager to ensure that all the areas of learning are covered, including early phonics and writing skills. Children visit school regularly, take part in forest school and are well prepared to join Reception.
- Your early years leader carefully evaluates children's needs when they join the Reception class. She ensures that they understand how to behave in the class and has high expectations for their learning and behaviour. Consequently, children make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for Year 1.
- My third line of enquiry was about how you are improving pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2. The new mathematics leader has scrutinised pupils' work, observed teaching and learning and carefully analysed pupils' test results. Consequently, she has an accurate view of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and any gaps in their learning. She has ensured that mathematics is a key target in your school improvement plan and is continuing to work with teachers to improve their teaching of mathematics. It was clear during our observation of learning in mathematics and in scrutinising pupils' books that there is rightly a greater focus on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving. It was also evident that improvements in teaching are already having an impact because pupils are making good progress from their starting points.
- My fourth line of enquiry was related to forest school and whether pupils understand how they can use the skills they learn outside the classroom to help them to learn better inside the classroom. In addition, I wanted to find out whether pupils effectively use the skills they learn in other subjects like

mathematics or science when they are in forest school. Subject leaders are working closely with the forest school teacher particularly in identifying curriculum links. There are some strong examples of joint working in literacy books, for example, improvements in pupils' use of more effective words to describe their experiences on a dragon hunt in forest school. However, pupils are not yet consistently recognising or perceiving these links. For example, they measure objects they find with string in forest school but do not have appropriate measuring equipment to hand to enable them to apply their knowledge of standard measures.

- My final line of enquiry was about how you are reducing persistent absence and ensuring that all pupils are safe. You have been successful in reducing persistent absence due to the strong support parents receive from your pastoral team. The parents who choose to send their children to the school using your flexi-school approach are highly committed to the school. Consequently, attendance of these pupils is good. However, you and the governors have identified that overall attendance is below average so far this year. You are taking robust action to address this but you and the governors recognise the need to make the rewards for good attendance more effective.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have opportunities to use the skills they learn in the classroom in forest school and the forest school curriculum is even more closely aligned to other curriculum subjects
- the rewards system for attendance is reviewed and results in good attendance for all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the assistant headteacher, subject leaders, the governors, a representative from the local authority, the designated safeguarding leads, the staff, pupils and parents. We observed learning and teaching in all classes including writing, mathematics, pre-school and forest school. I read with pupils at the early stages of learning to read in Reception, Years 1, 2 and 3. I scrutinised a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and school development plan. I scrutinised a range of pupils' mathematics books in lessons in

key stage 2 and scrutinised pupils' writing in English and other subjects with your curriculum leaders. I scrutinised a range of safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupil files. I scrutinised five responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, five responses to the online staff questionnaire and 10 responses to the online pupil questionnaire. I took into account one email from a parent.